



# The Follies of Rome

by Pieter Boogaart



Pieter and Rita Boogaart at the Temple of Asclepius, Villa Borghese

**F**orty years ago Rita and I got married and we went to Rome for our honeymoon. We were students and stayed at a students' apartment for five weeks. I had been to the Eternal City twice before during my grammar school days. One week in Rome, three weeks for the whole journey, sleeping in schools and monasteries on the way, and I'd absolutely loved it. So it was only natural to me to demand as a prerequisite for our engagement that we should go to Rome on our honeymoon. Stands to reason. Fortunately Rita agreed, or we might never have married. She studied history of art, so she knew already more about Rome than I would ever learn or forget. But I had the advantage of having acquired a fair grasp of Italian (as a language it is somewhere in between Latin and French), although almost all of that is gone now, what with strokes and old age, I suppose. Pity. Nowadays we speak English with Italian shopkeepers and bus drivers and where that is no use because they haven't learned the language (which is invariably the case), we accept that we are in trouble and give them something to laugh at by our attempts to speak Italian. We are way beyond shame in that respect.

As one of the ways to celebrate our Ruby Wedding Anniversary we decided on a second honeymoon to Rome, and rented an apartment for two weeks. This time it took only half a day to get there by Ryanair from our hometown of Eindhoven, a two hour flight. What a difference! But the eternal city appeared still to have remained virtually the same. Frantic traffic, erratic buses, wonderful food, ruins, big-city-people, obsequious waiters, beggars, alleys, little squares, monuments, excellent weather and millions of churches. The only difference being that most of these churches and monuments had been cleaned in the mean time in connection with the Holy Year 2000. This meant that most of Rita's slides are outdated now, and new ones are not available of course. This is 2008 and slides themselves are outdated. Rita's methods of lecturing are outdated. Rita is outdated. Poor girl.

But this is enough by way of introduction. On to business – Follies.

Our first destination was the Pope's own gardens. As Secretary for the Continent I wanted to report to you about yet another country in Europe: the [Vatican City](#). We had never been in

these gardens and reports on the internet by other people varied from exuberant to 'a complete waste of time'. We thought it was interesting, for us. The gardens were used by the Popes for quiet and relaxation. There is, for example, a cement life-size **reproduction of the Grotto of Lourdes** in France, presented in 1902 by the French Catholics to Leo XIII. There are strong towers and ramparts, built by various Popes, and other useful buildings include the town hall of Vatican City (which has its own car number plates), mint, printers, hospital, heliport, railway station, radio and TV station etcetera. All distributed over beautifully laid-out and well-kept gardens on different levels. Extremely well-kept even, but that had everything to do with the present Pope's arrival back in Rome from his summer residence in Castel Gandolfo that same afternoon. We only just missed him. But these Popes knew a good thing when they saw one. They still do.



Fontana dell'Aquilone, Vatican gardens

There are a few minor **fountains** and four major ones, three of them constructed by a Dutchman, Jan van Xanten (or Giovanni Vasanzio, to give him his Italian name) roundabout the year 1600. One of these three, the **Fontana dell' Aquilone**, is a grotto of rough stones, with niches sheltering spouting dragons, and the water comes down into a large basin. The eagle that spreads its wings on top of it and the dragons are emblems of the Borghese pope Paul V. Another Vasanzio fountain I leave to Rita in her Appendix at the end.



Casina Pia, Vatican gardens

An enormous modern celebratory **Millennium bell** has been put up by the side of the neat classical Italian garden, and in between two chapels of St Mary. There are a number of sculptures and statues, of course. Among them one of St Peter, whose famous church cupola can be seen from almost everywhere.

But the finest of all pieces of architecture in the Vatican gardens - on account of the setting that surrounds and isolates it - and the one that is best preserved, is the **casina** of Pius IV. It is composed of two buildings facing each other on an elliptical courtyard, as our guidebook describes. The villa with its façade richly decorated with stuccoes is to the west, and to the east is the loggia with a nymphaeum and fountain below. The north and south entrances to the courtyard sport reliefs and mosaics. One of the architects was Pirro Ligorio, who started work on it in 1553. The whole structure is in a word: superb. If only for those two little beauties it is for folly-lovers worthwhile visiting the Vatican gardens.

I can mention a few other gardens. At the Palazzo Quirinale there is a **coffeehouse** and fountain, built by Ferdinando Fuga for Pope Benedict XIV in 1741. And a great number of other gardens have nymphaea, fountains, statues and loggias. Rita spotted a rustic **hut** or cabin (below) at the Villa Barberini, built with wood and cork.



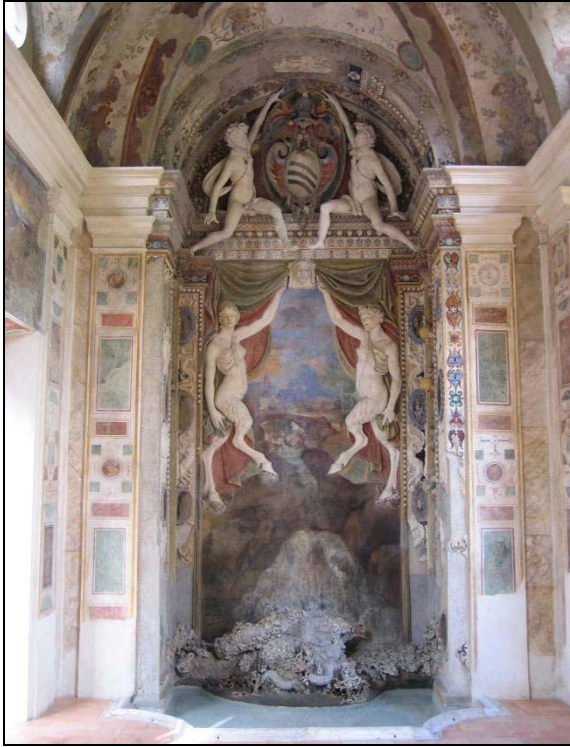
The Villa Giulia has a theatrical, even monumental three-tiered **nymphaeum** at the end of the loggia in the garden. But the amount of real follies is relatively small. Only with the rising popularity of the English Landscape Garden at the end of the eighteenth century did one or two Roman gardens gain aspects of follydom. As in the case of the Villa Borghese to which we shall come back later. But most gardens in Rome are much like the **Villa Medici**: many statues and fountains. One of our books mentions 'architectural elements' there (we saw e.g. a good **obelisk** fountain in a book), but no other descriptions that we came



The Loggia from the courtyard, Vatican gardens



across made mention of any kind of follies, so we skipped that. Did we miss something? Maybe, but it can't be helped. A fortnight may seem like a long time to spend in Rome, but you can only do so much, especially when opening times are restricted by official siestas and other considerations (sometimes you can only get access from 08.10 to 08.45h on snowy Ember days or something equally impossible).



North end of Nymphaeum Sacchetti

And Rome has more to offer for a dedicated researcher. A tiny little garden was near our apartment on the Campo dei Fiori. A sixteenth century **nymphaeum** had been recently restored at the Palazzo Sacchetti's patio. Normally it isn't open to the public, but just because they wanted to celebrate the restoration they invited the Roman population to come and have a look for one weekend. However: no photos could be taken for copyright reasons. Rita had to go back there a second and even a third time before she was allowed to take pictures for you. The scene is only small in a simple rectangular loggia with an arch to the garden and the river Tiber at the back. The paintings, mosaics and stucco reliefs were almost certainly done by the celebrated mannerist painter Francesco de Rossi. Highly decorative and colourful. Cheerful too, with these fauns dancing on overly long legs. There must be a lot more gardens of this type.

**Villa Borghese:** Our major guide-book (*ROME* by Mauro Lucentini (and other Lucentinis), Pallas Athene, 2006) says in its introduction to the grounds (which are 6 kilometres around) that the villa was formerly the property of the princely

Borghese family. The park, created in early 17thC along with the beautiful villa, was totally redesigned in the late 18thC by two Roman architects, Antonio and Mario Asprucci, who commissioned the Tyrolese sculptor Christopher Unters-perger to embellish it with *casinos* (cottages), fountains, statues and pseudo-temples in the Neoclassical style then coming into fashion. I could hardly have put it better myself; only I would have employed the word follies.

In the early 20thC the king of Italy bought the villa and gardens and donated them to the people, making it Rome's main public park. The guidebook continues to give a descriptive walk round the whole park, inclusive of the Villa Borghese itself, but we won't follow it (which is a shame in a way, for it is Rome's most intimate large museum: a collection presenting the absolute highlights of the Italian Renaissance and Baroque). Instead we will concentrate on the follies. That will be difficult enough, even if I don't bother you with too many details, dates and data.



Villa Borghese watertower, 1925

Where shall we start? Let's get the more useful buildings out of the way first. Rome's Zoo hides behind impressive **gatehouses**. The 1925 **watertower** – what a watertower! Round and square at the same time, ground floor looking like a temple, overhanging roof, weird. The **wine house**, (below) again looking like a classical round temple, sturdily built as entrance to a grotto room. The loudly decorated aviary by Vasanzio, very elaborate. Several museums, one of them in a mock-medieval **castle**. Monuments have been added in the course of the centuries, at least a





dozen, to figures as diverse as Umberto I, Garibaldi, Van der Capellen, Goethe, Byron, Hugo and Pushkin. Statues. Sarcophagi. Busts. Gateways. A sham theatre backdrop. **Kiosks**, both iron and stone. **Pavilions**. **Obelisks**. **Arches**. Secret gardens (where there is nothing to discover).



Villa Borghese, copy arch of Septimus Severus



Villa Borghese aviary in the secret garden



Villa Borghese, sham ruin



Villa Borghese, Swiss watertower

Fountains can't be avoided of course, neither the rustic nor the classical type. Grottoes. A clockhouse tower. A life-size Shakespearean Globe theatre, built in 2003, I kid you not! Temples – what shall I say? From a stately mock-ruin with Greek lettering via the sham temple of Aesculapius (on a peninsula in a boating lake) to an exquisite rotunda. A wooden-looking (so called Swiss) watertower was added in 1872: big, octagonal and executed in rustic cement. We saw a rustic water-clock, the mechanism of which we couldn't fathom because it was under restoration. They have two types of propylaea: enormous classical ones at the Monte Pincio entrance and further inside the park in the ancient Egyptian style. Have I got it all? I must have forgotten something. Some things. In short: it's a park for folly-lovers to spend a day in. If you read *Italian Villa Borghese*, published by Edizione de Luca in 2000, is worth having.



Villa Borghese, Egyptian propylaea



Villa Borghese, classical propylaea Monte Pincio





Villa Torlonia, Swiss Cottage of the Owls

**Villa Torlonia.** A folly-friend of ours (hello Joop!) had sent us a few pages about the Museo della Casina delle Civette, the museum of the Swiss Cottage of the Owls. This house (1840) was originally intended to be a bucolic and informal retreat in marked contrast to the nearby magnificently restored Neoclassical Villa Torlonia, which was, at one time, the home of Benito Mussolini. But in 1908 the young Prince Torlonia added a number of towers to this Swiss Cottage and then again later it got the look of the jumbled Art Nouveau hotchpotch that it is now. It houses a stylish little museum with much stained glass. The park contains a few useful buildings, such as coachhouses and a theatre. But most interesting to us is a Turkish greenhouse (under reconstruction) and a number of artificial 'ruins'. These 'ruins' look very neat and lend it the air of a folly garden. Not all of them are fully three-dimensional: they are more like temple fronts against the walls.



Villa Torlonia, sham ruins



Tivoli, Villa d'Este, Rometta

**Tivoli.** In the second week of our stay we got an SMS: "Are you still in Rome? We arrived this morning." We returned the call and it turned out to be from Iain and Gill! The Grays were there for a few days only and we immediately decided to have lunch together and make an appointment for the next day to go to Tivoli with them. And we did. We ourselves had been there forty years ago and this time we especially wanted to see Rometta, little Rome, because that part had been under restoration at the time. We saw it now. It consists of small-scale buildings of ancient Rome put together on a little height above a grotto. At the foot of the grotto is a basin representing the Tiber. (Rita will tell you more in the Appendix.) Decorations are all over the place. But..... I am getting ahead of myself. I was talking about the Villa d'Este of course. Let's do this properly and try and get some order here.

The **Villa d'Este.** In the mid-16thC Cardinal Ippolito II d'Este took up his appointment as civil governor of Tivoli. It was he who started the gardens, which are laid out against a steep slope and are most famous for their waterworks. What waterworks! A masterpiece of hydraulic engineering, the master being Pirro Ligorio again, who was working in the nearby Villa Adriana as well. At some 30 km east of Rome and at some height in the mountains you might think that people wouldn't need elaborate waterworks to keep cool, but apparently they did. 1,200 litres of water per second (per second!) are drawn from the local river Aniene for this garden alone. There are 250 waterfalls, 100 ponds and 50 fountains and 20,000 flower vases, to mention but a few of the figures. That's some garden.



Tivoli, Villa d'Este, Organ Fountain

A few details are required. 1. The Organ fountain – hydraulic. Water is projected from a large toothed cylinder on to the keys of a manual, thus sounding the organ. Famous composers have created music for this instrument, e.g. Sussato and Telemann. 2. The fountain of Nature is also peculiar. A many-breasted statue of Diana of Ephesus, symbol of fertility, spouts water from every breast. 3. The Neptune fountain was only added in 1927. Its many jets and waterfalls are the most impressive ones in all the garden. 4. The Owl fountain, very colourful with delicate paintwork was the counter-piece of the Organ Fountain, with mechanically singing birds. 5. The Hundred Fountains Avenue runs between the Rometta area and 6. The gorgeous Oval fountain, parallel with the Villa. I remember we walked behind the water curtain forty years ago. 7. The Diana grotto is richly decorated with stuccoes, mosaics and reliefs. There are more grottoes, naturally. Grottoes go with waterworks. But I had better stop this description. Go and have a look yourself. Celebrate your own Ruby Wedding Anniversary and go to Rome.



Tivoli, Vesta temple

On our way to the Villa Adriana we saw the round **Vesta temple** in Tivoli from afar. It is of significance for folly-lovers, this one, because this 1stC BC temple served as a model for a great number of 18thC and early 19thC gardens where follies of fashion were designed, the classical kind.

Tivoli, The **Villa Adriana** is better known to the English as Hadrian's Villa. It is undoubtedly the greatest and grandest of all the Imperial villas of ancient Rome. Hadrian himself was the same Hadrian that built the famous wall in the north of England and the mausoleum which is now the Castel Sant' Angelo (Castle of the Holy Angel) in Rome. His 2ndC palace at a few kilometres from Tivoli represents the realisation of the Emperor's dreams and ambitions. His passion was architecture and he had travelled extensively, especially in Greece, and so, after he came to power, he amalgamated his experiences in these buildings. He was perhaps the first folly-builder, for he built eclectically and purely for his own pleasure. And thus he constructed two large bath complexes with sun-bathing lounges, swimming pools, a frigidarium and a gymnasium. A stadium and a race-course. Basilicas, temples, two libraries, a college

and two theatres for the more intellectually inclined. Guest-houses obviously. He used fountains, colonnades, loggias, arched vaults, statues, caryatids, courtyards, gardens, avenues and what not, round the many pools. Graceful curves of walls, bold sweeps of arches, well-balanced spaces. All very classical of course and all very much in ruins nowadays. But they were in ruins in the 18thC too, and inspired many of the gentlemen and noblemen, the Milordi, that came to Rome to finish off their education on the Grand Tour and upon their return built sham ruins in their gardens, reminding them of Tivoli among other things.



Tivoli, Villa Adriana, Canopus Canal

As I said: Rome was wonderful, Rita was wonderful (Iain and Gill were wonderful as well). You do unusual things there. We went to see the inside of some headquarters of the major banks in Italy. A complimentary bus ran round the offices in Rome one day. Great. Varying from Renaissance palaces to Mussolini-style to Art Nouveau. We also climbed the Gianicolo hill for a panoramic view of Rome and to have a look at the marble-covered lighthouse there, a symbol of Rome's leading role as a beacon to the world. Italian migrants to Argentina presented it to the city in 1911. The lighthouse used to project beams over Rome in the colours of the Italian flag. Wonderful.



Rome, Lighthouse on Gianicolo hill, 1911





Area Coppedè, Rome.

And finally we went to the **Area Coppedè** (neighbourhood). It is called after the Florentine architect Gino Coppedè, who created variations of the Art Nouveau style for an area of housing estates behind the Borghese Park round the Piazza Mincio. Playful eclecticism: medieval motifs are involved too. There is an enormous chandelier hanging under a low arch between two housing blocks. Weird. Cars are parked underneath. It's only a small area and normal Roman people have never heard of it. Guidebooks don't mention it, except our Pallas Athene guide, I am pleased to say. It was only recently discovered by the tourist trade. And by architect training centres. That may be why we spotted several youngsters with cameras there.

Rome hides many things. It's a place to discover on foot. There must be scores of gardens with half-follies tucked away somewhere. Or whole follies even. We may have to wait till our Golden Wedding to find out about them. We are willing. And after that the Diamond Wedding. And what's the next wedding called?

## APPENDIX ABOUT BOAT FOUNTAINS

Rita Boogaart



Rome, Fontana della Barcaccia

I have been fascinated for some time now by boats holding water instead of keeping the water out. In a small way I saw an example in Controversy Farm, Hoogwoud, The Netherlands, where the bathroom had a proper polyester dinghy as bath tub. And a few years ago Yoland Brown sent me an old

photograph of the stone or concrete Water Tank Boat in Zanzibar, with taps along the bottom.

In Rome I knew about the famous Fontana della Barcaccia at the bottom of the Spanish Steps; this waterlogged boat spills water over the sides into the basin. Difficult to photograph without a crowd of thirsty admirers. Quite different in that respect from another, much smaller stone boat that stands forlorn on a stone pedestal in front of the Santa Maria in Domnica, at the Piazza della Navicella. The galley was put there in the sixteenth century, but it dates from antiquity, probably a temple gift after a safe return to Rome.

In the Vatican gardens I saw a very similar white marble boat fountain, resting on two dolphins and scrolls, but that was of minor importance. What we really wanted to see was a large galleon of lead, bronze and copper, an exact scale model of a warship with riggings and all, spouting water from its gun holes into a basin. This Fontana della Galera by Giovanni Vansanzio and Martino Ferabosco represents Pope Paul V's pontificate: the pope's warship extinguishes flames of war by its sweet water guns. It was built together with the Fontana Aquilone and the Fontana del Sacramento to celebrate and accentuate the restoration of the aqueduct and water supply of the Aqua Paola (Paul's water) reaching the Vatican around 1620. But when we found it we couldn't measure its size or admire its splendour, for it was behind scaffolding, under restoration! Bad luck.

The last boat fountain, this time in Tivoli's Villa d'Este, was under restoration forty years ago. But now the whole area was cleaned and restored, the boat in the basin spouting water from gun holes in the hull and straight up like two water masts. No riggings here: in the middle rises a tall stone obelisk. This Fontana della Rometta represents the Isola Tiberina (Tiber Island) below Rometta, the miniature Rome that we had missed on our honeymoon.



Tivoli, Villa d'Este, Fontana della Rometta



## Annual Garden Party at Wotton House, Wotton Underwood on Sunday 30th August 2009

When I heard what a lot of work had been done since we last visited Wotton House I couldn't wait to go and see for myself what had been happening.

Our member Charles Boot knows Wotton very well and as Chairman of the Bucks Gardens Trust has developed a very good relationship with its owners David and April Gladstone. The Trust is holding a conference there this autumn.

Incidentally, you will all have recently received the latest Follies Journal (together with an invitation to the Garden Party) and that really fine piece of work was edited by the very same Charles Boot. If you think his work is as good as I do and you'd like to tell him so, you can email me (and I'll pass on what you say) at [gg@candycollect.co.uk](mailto:gg@candycollect.co.uk).

April Gladstone's mother bought Wotton soon after WW2 on very favourable terms but a very great deal of work was needed. As you'll see, today's maintenance of the landscape is second to none and a stroll with friends old and new will be well rewarded in more senses than one.

First, there's much to see, what with a variety of the sort of landscape architecture The Folly Fellowship loves and lots of it.

Second, you'll have earned a really good Folly Fellowship tea after spending the afternoon in gentle exercise and a really really good tea is what you're going to get.

Some of our members like to dress up for the occasion: on the one hand Andrew Plumridge and on quite the other Pat Patrick.

Many members bring guests with them and often those guests become members. Can there be a better introduction to a society with so much to offer?

Iain Gray



Wotton House Tartar Tent

Don't forget our last event for this year:

## The Forbidden Corner Tuppill Park, Coverham, Yorkshire Saturday 12 September

The Forbidden Corner is a unique labyrinth of tunnels, chambers, follies and surprises created in a four acre garden in the heart of the Yorkshire Dales. Since we held our Garden Party here in 2001 a number of new features have been added; the Face Tower now devours guests and we hope to visit the house to see yet more surprises. Colin Armstrong and his amusing and brilliant architect, our very own Malcolm Tempest, always make members of the Folly Fellowship so very welcome.

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All the pictures in this e-bulletin are by Pieter and Rita Boogaart, who guest-edited this issue.  
More pictures from Rome you can find in *Follies* 73 and in index 6 (*follies* 61-72)