

RIVISTA

n. 392 Winter 2009 The Magazine of the British-Italian Society

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The Magazine of the British-Italian Society
n. 392 Winter 2009
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SOLICITING ALL BIS MEMBERS

Future issues of "RIVISTA" will be as good as you make them. May we strongly encourage you to pick up your pen (or put fingers to your laptop keyboard) and send in your contributions for consideration. Provided there is a British-Italian angle, articles on history, art, humour, travel, miscellany, as well as book reviews are all welcome.

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THIS ISSUE INCLUDES

- CAMBRIDGE OUTING	4	- ITALY – IS NOT JUST FOR THE ITALIANS!	14
- LITTLE ITALY	5	- THE SILKMAKERS OF CORTALE	15
- THE MISSONI EXHIBITION	7	- PINO ORIOLI: A FORGOTTEN LITERARY LINK BETWEEN ITALY AND BRITAIN	16
- ON THE MANZONI TRAIL	8	- PERSONAL AND PUBLIC 'PENSIERI' ON PIAZZA DI SPAGNA	18
- A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ITALIAN VILLAGE: A MEMOIR	9	- PONTE VECCHIO: THE GOLDEN BRIDGE OF FLORENCE	20
- THE CHAIRMAN WALKS	10	- ELIZABETH DAVID AND THE WRITING OF HER ITALIAN COOKERY BOOK	24
- PANETTONE: THE QUINTESSENTIAL ITALIAN CAKE – AND NOT ONLY AT CHRISTMAS!	12		
- PAYING TRIBUTE TO ALL WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN L'AQUILA AND SURROUNDING AREAS	13		



SEASONS' GREETINGS



TO ALL MEMBERS INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING CORPORATE MEMBERS:

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and also to all the organisations who have contributed towards Rivista. A special thank you to
The Italian State Tourist Board and The Italian Cultural Institute.

EDITORIAL

Dear Members

With this issue of Rivista, we bring you new names, not only our own, as the present co-editors of the magazine but those of fresh contributors.

It is hoped that after a read-through, BIS members will be inspired to take pen to paper and send in contributions of their own for future issues.

Some of the names and topics featured in this issue: Alessandro Roselli, who has given us a delightful account of the colourful Florence publisher Pino Orioli. Next time Florence is visited, we are sure to step through the doors of the Libreria Gonnelli for a browse through the rare and special books which Orioli published. Roselli has also taken us back in time very evocatively with his remembrance of a childhood in Santa Rufina.

Stephen Porter has given us an extra reason for laughter. We all need that over the holiday season, with his recollection of impish behaviour as a youngster and the warmth the Italians showed him during one particular disaster.

Charles de Chassiron, who certainly is no stranger to the pages of Rivista, has taken us up the mountainous trails of Tuscany and Liguria on his Monte San Martino trek, revisiting partisan and escaped POW sites of World War II.

You will note two new books reviewed in this issue. There is Mark Thompson's The White War about the 1915-1918 War on

the Italian-Austrian front. Propitiously, this review precedes the talk that Mr Thompson will give BIS members on Wednesday 10th March 2010. The theme of war, or rather prisoners of war, continues in our pages with The Italian Chapel, written by Philip Paris. It is a story of the Italian prisoners of war in the Orkneys who fashioned their own church there.

Charles Avery recounts the enjoyable and interesting day BIS members spent in Cambridge on 6th June 2009 when they visited the Fitzwilliam Museum. The participants were divided into two groups: one group was taken by Dr Stella Panayotova to the grand library to look at early manuscripts, whilst the other group was taken by Dr Julia Poole to see the fine collection of 'maiolica'.

We wish to present past and present topics which are of Anglo-Italian interest to the British-Italian Society, as well as share members' experiences and recollections bringing to life not just the historical past but also to review past memories and inspire the creation of new ones. It is a way to keep members in touch with Italy and the long-standing relationship between the two countries, Italy and the UK. Rivista is also another way to share the enjoyment of events held by the BIS, especially for members who were unable to attend them.

Georgina Gordon-Ham and Alexandra Richardson
Co-Editors

The Italian Ambassador

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November 2009

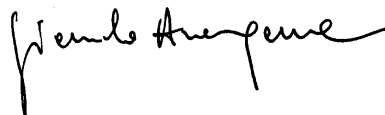
Sadly, I will shortly come to the end of my Mission in London and before I leave I would like to say a few words to the good friends of the British-Italian Society.

For any Italian Ambassador to the Court of St. James's, the British-Italian Society is an institution of great importance. The work of the Society, which I have personally witnessed over the past five years, is fundamental to maintaining and strengthening the close ties which exist between our two Countries. During my time in London, I have been privileged to attend many of the events which are organized by the Society and which continue to provide a forum for all those who love Italy to develop and extend their knowledge and appreciation of all things Italian.

The work of the Society also serves to promote the teaching of Italian in the United Kingdom through initiatives such as the Rooke Memorial Prize. This is something that is greatly appreciated both by the recipients who benefit from these awards but it also has a much wider resonance by encouraging people to take an interest in the Italian language and culture.

Under the sterling Chairmanship of Charles de Chassiron and the President Sir Tom Richardson, together with the Trustees of the Society, I am certain that the British-Italian Society will continue to flourish and to offer an essential and important point of reference for anyone who is interested in Italy and Italian Culture.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Society, also on behalf of the Italian Government for its outstanding commitment. I am certain that my successors will continue to work closely with the Society in the years to come.



Giancarlo Aragona

BRITISH-ITALIAN SOCIETY EVENTS 2010

Thursday January 28th
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

The University
Women's Club
2 Audley Square
London W1K 1DB.

Alexandra Richardson presents her book – **PASSIONATE PATRON** – about the life of Alexander Hardcastle and the Greek Temples of Agrigento

Thursday February 25th
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

The University
Women's Club
2 Audley Square
London W1K 1DB.

A talk by Judith Wade – **GRANDI GIARDINI ITALIANI** – and Luchino Visconti's documentary video about the network of private Italian gardens.

Wednesday March 10th
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

The University
Women's Club
2 Audley Square
London W1K 1DB.

Mark Thompson presents his book about the Life and Death of the Italian Front 1915-1919: **THE WHITE WAR** (Invitations extended to the British-Slovene Society)

WATCH OUT FOR EVENTS THEREAFTER.

CAMBRIDGE OUTING, 6 JUNE 2009

by Charles Avery

A good number of members assembled in the imposing entrance stairway of the Fitzwilliam Museum for a welcome and a general introduction to the history of the museum by Dr Julia Poole. We were given handy leaflets with a summary of the Italian holdings and then divided into two groups of manageable size to look in detail at either the Italian maiolica or the Manuscripts and early books – an agonising choice for some.

Julia then introduced one group to her field of expertise, Italian maiolica (on which she wrote the Fitzwilliam Catalogue of 1995 and the Handbook of 1997): the generic name we use today is derived from the description as 'lavori di maiolicha' applied during the Renaissance to the glamorous lusterware that was being imported by the shipload into Italy from Islamic North Africa ('Hispano-Moresque'), via the island that we now call Majorca. Collecting this colourful tin-glazed earthenware in England began with some of the grandest of Grand Tourists, Sir Andrew Fountaine (for Narford), the 9th Earl of Exeter (for Burleigh) and Horace Walpole (for Strawberry Hill). Then, in the age of the Pre-Raphaelites (between 1840 and 1900), attention turned to the simpler, but characterful, products of the 15th and early 16th century. The museum was a 'late in beginner', with a box of sherds of early geometrically ornamented ware from Orvieto, but then benefited from bequests by five of the greatest collectors ever – Marlay, Leverton Harris, Glaisher, Clarke and Reitlinger – leaving the Fitzwilliam Museum with one of the most representative holdings in Britain – the others being in the British, Victoria & Albert, and Ashmolean Museums.

Julia spoke passionately about the evolution of the shapes and patterns from the primitive designs in a restricted palette from Orvieto, via the so-called 'oak-leaf' patterns applied in cobalt blue in Tuscany from 1350-ish, and then in the 16th century to a full palette of gorgeous colours in which facsimiles of paintings could be rendered all over the surface. These were often based on engravings, notably some by Marcantonio Raimond after Raphael. Manufactories arose in Deruta, Faenza, Gubbio, Pesaro and Cafaggiolo (near Florence). We enjoyed being let into the secrets of the (sometimes partially concealed) signatures and gradual identification of the principal makers, as well as of devices such as the crutch, symbol of the Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova in Florence (found on the handles of at least 21 'oak-leaf' pharmacy jars). The importance to the study of maiolica of the patronage of the elite of the period was explained, for their coats-of-arms were frequently applied, and this helps to 'place' – and sometimes to date – particular examples.

A favourite was a Botticelli-like profile of a fair young woman on a dish from Deruta: decorated in an elegantly restricted palette of blue and gold, the latter was a 'piatto di pompa', an ornament rather than a piece of tableware. This prompted a discussion as to how these glorious products were used. Lack of signs of wear by cutlery or scouring suggest that they were

primarily for display, because they were a cheaper, yet more colourful, substitute for the more expensive items fashioned out of gold or silver that were fashionable among royalty, nobility and highly-placed clergy.

We all benefited from Julia's intimate knowledge of 'her' collection and the engaging way in which she shared her hard-won wisdom; and came away with a much-enhanced interest in this important aspect of the Italian Renaissance, bridging as it does the perceived gulfs between Fine and Decorative art and between collecting, connoisseurship and art-dealing.

Meanwhile Dr Stella Panayotova (a Bulgarian art historian and the Keeper) conducted the other group to the grand library of the museum's founder, Viscount Fitzwilliam (1745-1816) to see some wonderful manuscripts and incunabula – early printed books. Among the most striking were a 'Life of Charlemagne' once given as a diplomatic gift by King Louis IX of France to Lorenzo de' Medici in 1461 (it was bought by the museum's founder in 1814), a 'Book of Hours' made in Naples for the Strozzi family in Florence about a decade later, and an astronomical treatise from the Gonzaga collections, again dating from the late 15th century – this time purchased by the great and acquisitive Fitzwilliam director, Sidney Cockerell in the 1920s.

Our members were allowed to examine and handle these marvellous works, as well as several others put out for us, including early books from Padua, Bologna, Florence (again), Siena and Milan. Finally we were shown some illustrations from medieval manuscript books, cut out (though not by the Museum) in the 19th century, a regrettable habit that was then all too common, even among scholars! Both groups, sated but enthusiastic, then moved on to the two main Italian Galleries to re-view familiar favourites or discover new ones.

We then stepped across the road to enjoy lunch, a veritable feast, in the ancient Hall of Pembroke College and were given the freedom of its blissful courts and gardens, thanks to the Society's introduction through the Fellow in Italian Studies, Dr Kenneth Clarke, an expert on Dante and Chaucer. Then it was time to settle down in the lecture theatre to be enthralled by the classicist and well-known broadcasting personality, Professor Mary Beard, with a talk on Pompeii, a subject with which she won a major non-fiction book prize soon afterwards. Her vivid and forthright narrative and excellent pictures ranged from the sublime (fine architecture and works of art) to the obscene, with an enthusiastic account of the scurrilous inscriptions on the walls of lavatories, brothels and gladiators' barracks! The afternoon concluded in the nearby Fellows' Garden with a reception with good wine and delicious refreshments, under the setting sun (and gradually rising wind, this being – after all – not Italy, but good, old England!). We blessed the hospitality and excellent service of the staff of Pembroke College and gratefully took our leave.

LITTLE ITALY

by Georgina Gordon-Ham

Most people know about British-Italian relations going as far back as the invasion of Britain under the Roman Empire with all the historical consequences, but not so much about what happened centuries later. In the early 1800s a new type of colony appeared in London. Adolphe Smith in *Street Life in London* (1877) wrote about them commenting "Most persons are aware that there is an Italian colony at Saffron Hill, but it is strange how few visitors ever penetrate this curious quarter. The Italians have certainly succeeded in keeping themselves apart from the rest of the population. Whole courts and alleys are inhabited by these foreigners; there is not a single English person among them."

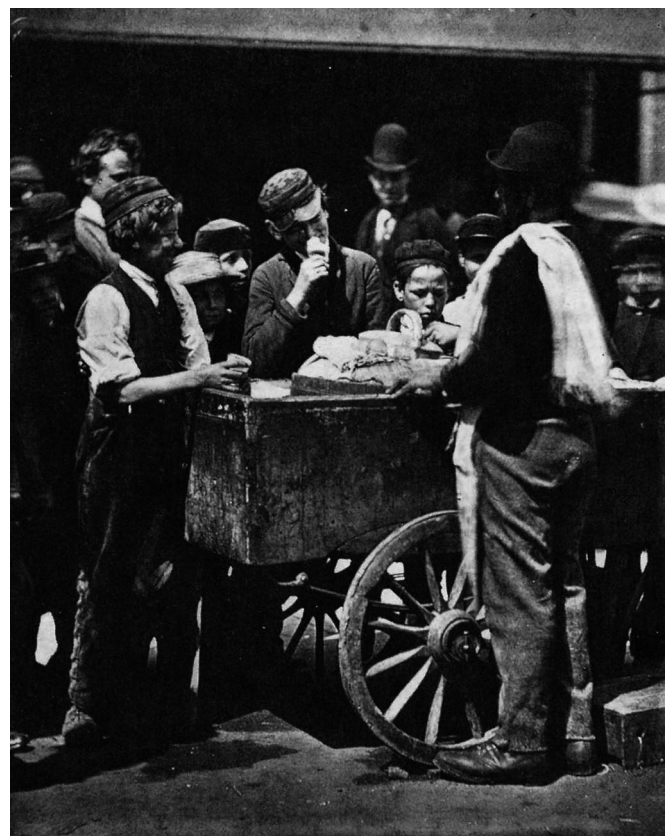
Tudor Allen, Senior Archivist at Camden Local Studies Centre, Holborn Library gave us a fascinating talk at the British-Italian Society's AGM in June on these settlers from Italy. Tudor Allen is the researcher behind Camden Archives Exhibition "Little Italy" held last year as well as the author of a book under the same name. History is brought to life thanks to the careful analytical work by archivists like himself who dig into the past and document what otherwise might have been buried and forgotten.

His illustrated talk based on his recently published book and photographs of the time took us through various aspects of the life in "Little Italy", as the London district of Holborn occupied by a growing number of Italians was called in the 19th century right up to the last days of the community a century later. Although Little Italy is not easy to define geographically, the Italian quarter was to the north and south of Clerkenwell Road and surrounding area with its narrow streets and alleys, such as Saffron Hill, Leather Lane and Hatton Garden. Dramatic incidents, living conditions which at times were even unhygienic, occupations, leisure pursuits, colourful processions and dancing the Tarantella, including institutions of Holborn's Italian community brought together a story full of life and initiative. 'Little Italy' was not just an area inhabited by Italians, it was also a way of life.

The Italian community in London came from a mixture of backgrounds ranging from educated political refugees to craftsmen. The first settlers in London came mostly from Piemonte and Lombardia and were craftsmen bringing with them a trade often passed down from generation to generation. Holborn was the centre of craftsmanship which is no doubt what attracted them to that part of the city. These crafts ranged from picture frames and precision instruments, to knife grinding, fortune tellers, actors, ice cream makers and restaurants just to mention some of the trades. Enrico Negretti was a well known name in London in the 1850s for glass blowing and thermometers. Another name associated with thermometers and barometers was Zambra. The two men joined forces and set up a precision instrument making business called Negretti and Zambra. Joseph Grimaldi was known as Jo, the 'Clown'. Then other settlers began to arrive from other parts of Italy. Mosaicists came from Friuli, Emilia and Tuscany. Plaster figurine makers came from Lucca. A number of street musicians came from Parma. One of the main occupations of Italians in 'Little Italy', the Italian quarter in Holborn, was organ-

grinding which led Giuseppe Chiappa in 1877 to set up a business which made him famous for musical instruments and organ works. The Chiappa and Sons workshop and office are still there today at 31 Eyre Street Hill. In the 1880s Mr Voltrona was seen in the streets of London playing his 'zampogna', the Italian mountain shepherds' bagpipe. This instrument is often played in towns in Italy by the 'zampognari' themselves at Christmas time as a way to earn some extra money.

Then came the 'seconda ondata', this time from the south of Italy, in particular Naples and Calabria. Most of them worked their way to London. At the end of the 19th century Italian ice cream vendors appeared in the streets. They worked hard and used to start work at four in the morning. Tudor Allen covered the way these settlers began their life in London to how some of them became very successful business people. Italians always had a flair for food, so it is no surprise that ice cream vendors became successful and wealthy. They were known as the "Hokey-pokey Men". It is thought that this expression derived from the cry of the seller in Italian of "Ecco un poco" (here is a small piece) or "o che poco" (Oh, how little) referring to the cheap price. I think it is more likely to be the latter. These ice creams were also known as the 'Penny ices'. They excelled in ice cream making, which made them so popular that Henry Mayhew wrote in *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) "The sale of ice-creams was unknown in the streets until last



Half penny ices – Italian Ice Cream Vendor (photo by courtesy of Archives of Camden Local Studies Centre)

summer and was first introduced by a man who purchased his ices of a confectioner in Holborn...The buyers had but a confused notion how the ice was to be swallowed." There were about 900 ice cream workers in and around Holborn at the time. They decorated their barrows and depicted Italian and British royalty. Ice cream vendors were mostly family run businesses. It became quite an affluent occupation as in the case of Carlo Gatti, one of the first greatly publicised Italian ice cream makers, who started selling ice creams in London in the 1840s. His product became so famous that he died a millionaire. Other names in catering and food include Terroni & Sons who opened in Clerkenwell Road in 1890 and Gazzano's in Farringdon Road in 1901. Alfredo Mariani, the father-in-law of Giuseppe Gazzano, was the original owner. Unfortunately Terroni closed down in 2007 although the shop still stands today. Several of these new immigrants initially worked in London's restaurants and later started their own businesses. The Italian community increased so much that an Italian hospital was created, founded by Natali in Queen's Square. Unfortunately this was closed down about twenty years ago, a century later, due to lack of funds. However, what still stands today is St Peter's Church. St Peter's built in 1863 in Clerkenwell Road in the centre of London is the oldest church for Italians in the city. It is also the area where the annual Italian 'sagra' is held coinciding with the procession in honour of our Lady of Mount Carmel. This festival has become a great summer

attraction. The procession starts from St Peter's Church and winds its way through the streets of London's old Italian community, a tradition going back to the 1880s and taking place every July. It was the first Roman Catholic event allowed on English streets since Henry VIII broke off relations with Rome and Queen Victoria gave local police special permission for it to be held.

Today few Italians live in the neighbourhood, but many come to watch the procession from various parts of the UK. The event is known for its colourful floats depicting biblical scenes and costumes. It is complemented by a typical Italian 'sagra' with food and drink stalls and dancing, thus creating a special atmosphere and touch of Italy. Both the talk and book by Tudor Allen were so interesting that I decided to go and visit the area of 'Little Italy', and 'curiosare un po'. What struck me most was to see so many Italian names about. I had never been to St Peter's Church before which is very Italian and light Baroque in style. There happened to be a wedding and the bride and bridegroom were just coming out of the church. The atmosphere was very Italian. Yet Rolls Royces and purposely hired double deckers were lined outside waiting to drive away the couple and guests. The scene depicted a typical example of bringing cultures together and combining Anglo-Italian traditions 'con disinvoltura'.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Mr Tudor Allen
 Dr Renata Bartoli
 Prof Mary Beard
 Mr & Mrs Pier Luigi & Anna Rita Berretta
 Ms Denise Byrne
 Ms Carla Capalbo
 Ms Gillian Craig
 Mr R. B. Dawson
 Ms Frances M. Evans
 Ms Judith Evans Life Member
 Prof Jane Everson
 Ms Clare Ford-Wille
 Mr Nick Gray Life Member
 Miss Elizabeth Z. Gilbert
 Mr C. Howgrave-Graham
 Mr Angelo Iudice
 Ms Anita Klein
 Mr.G.P.A. Laffineur
 Mr David Lane
 Mr Richard Lynagh QC

Mr Thomas MacAulay
 Mr Joshua Munro Life Member
 Mr J.H.A. Pakington
 Ms Barbara Panella
 Ms Teresa Pastena
 Ms Esther Peters
 Mr Denis Reidy
 Mr Justin Raccanello
 Ms Jemima Rolbant
 Ms Manuela Rundo
 Dr Peter Shahbenderian
 Ms Janet Shreeve
 Miss Sue J. Stevens
 Dr Simone Testa
 Mr David Walter
 Mrs Gillian Western Life Member
 Ms Alison Williams
 Ms Reiko Yorita Life Member
 Mr Emiliano Zanaboni

Our deepest sympathies to Sir Paul Girolami, our past President, for the loss of his wife Christabel. Also our most sincere condolences to John Cullis for the loss of his wife Harriet.

Congratulations to Reiko and Eugenio for the birth of a baby boy James Kei born on 20th October 2009.

THE MISSONI EXHIBITION

by Georgina Gordon-Ham

The British-Italian Society resumed activities in September after the summer recess. The first event of the 2009/10 programme was a private viewing of the Missoni Exhibition at the Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art with a very interesting and exhaustive introductory talk by Claudia Daniotti, the centre's Education Assistant. Dr Daniotti also gave some background on the permanent collection which focuses very much on Futurist artists, who include Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo and Gino Severini alongside other well known names such as Giorgio de Chirico, Amedeo Modigliani and Giorgio Morandi.

The Missoni fashion designers were greatly influenced by Futurist and Modernist painters, hence the Estorick Collection was the ideal environment to hold their exhibition accompanied by *The Black and White of Colour*, a thirty minute documentary on the Missoni family and their workshop.

It is a fascinating story of talent combined with a keen observation of nature and the outside world. The founders of the fashion house were Ottavio and Rosita Missoni, a husband and wife team. Ottavio was originally an athlete, who qualified to take part in the 1948 Olympics in London for the final of the



Display of Missoni Fashion designs (photo by courtesy of Nicholas Harvey Photography)



Ottavio and Rosita Missoni (photo by courtesy of Nicholas Harvey Photography)

400 metre hurdle race. It was in London where he met his future wife Rosita Jelmini, the granddaughter of a family of shawl and ladieswear manufacturers from Varese. They got married in 1953 and brought their skills together for what was to become a very successful family business in the knitwear industry. They started out as a small workshop producing jersey tracksuits for the Italian Olympic team. Ottavio contributed his energy and athletic background, knowledge of dynamics and love for movement whilst Rosita had a fantastic feeling for colour. Their rainbow of colours and zigzag designs, interwoven with such 'gusto', are what draws and holds our attention. One can see that 'estro' and touch of an artist in their works. Their designs were influenced by modern artists, such as Tancredi, Sonia Delaunay, Giacomo Balla and Gino Severini, whilst nature and the landscape of Sumirago in northern Italy where they are based with its views of Monte Rosa inspired the colours of their fabrics. Hues of violet often served as a background. Even dark backgrounds produced movement through the patterns. Rosita once said "We are not really collectors but we like to be surrounded by things we like". She then went on to say how "colour, catching light and geometry" are important aspects to grasp in the dynamics of design. It was their way of looking at art and fashion. Their taste is a reflection of their world interweaving past and present. They had an art of putting together colours and stripes making them vibrant. The Missoni couple created a knitwear revolution. Their personal eccentricity and curiosity was the result of an experimental journey, which Ottavio and Rosita Missoni passed on to their three children Vittorio, Angela and Luca, who continue the family business in the Missoni spirit and style. The Missoni family is a fascinating story and an inspiration to all of us.

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ON THE MANZONI TRAIL

by Alexandra Richardson

In a letter in the summer of 1823 from Italy to his close friend Claude Fauriel in Paris, the author wrote of the first draft of his novel, "all I can tell you of it in conscience is that I have tried to know exactly and to paint sincerely the period and the country in which I have placed my story...I've stuffed it with peasants, nobles, monks, nuns, priests, magistrates, scholars, war, famine..." Self-effacing words about a book later described as Italy's first modern historical novel. It would go into 500 editions, sell an astounding 600 copies in the first twenty days after initial publication, be translated into all major languages including Chinese, add sizeable chunks of prose to the galaxy of quotation books. It would proudly march into – and *stay in* – the curriculum of every Italian school child over the age of thirteen. The author was Alessandro Manzoni and the book, of course, "I Promessi Sposi" or "The Betrothed". A first version came out in 1827 which he continued to rework, pruning out much of the dialogue that initially appeared in pure Milanese dialect. The definitive version went into print in 1840 when Manzoni was 55 years old.

He set most of his book in and around 17th century Lecco, 56 kilometres northeast of Milan. It was a town that he knew well: his father had inherited the handsome stone ancestral "Villa Caleotto" (now a municipal museum) where young Alessandro spent his childhood and returned to for summer holidays. And it is in this area that the adventure of his 20-year old hero Renzo Tremaglini begins with his pretty young fiancée, Lucia Mondella who has unwittingly captured the fancy of a powerful local despot, Don Rodrigo. This scoundrel sends his *bravo*es – toughs – to thwart the timorous and bumbling parish priest Don Abbondio from marrying the two the next day, November 8, 1628. Thus begins the pair's downward spiral: they must flee town. Lucia is bundled off to a convent outside Monza. Following various mishaps in Milan, Renzo escapes the Duchy of Milan over into the Bergamo countryside in the Venetian Republic to lie low. Before long, Lucia is plucked from her nuns and spirited back to the mountaintop eyrie above Lecco of yet *another* villain, the so-called "Unnamed". Unnamed has carried out this dastardly deed to humour his evil neighbour Don Rodrigo. But then, Unnamed has misgivings and with newfound faith, Sees The Light. He does the decent thing: he frees Lucia. Don Rodrigo slinks off to Milan humiliated where Manzoni will shortly polish him off in a graphically described plague epidemic. In the end, some 20 months later, the steadfast youngsters fulfil their dream and finally marry.

On the surface, the book may seem simply a sweeping portrayal of good and evil, of tested faith, all set in a landscape that the author knew and loved. But ask virtually any Italian school teacher of its true worth today and they rightly rise to its defence. Professor Mariolina Ghezzi, who teaches Italian literature to young teenagers in Prato, is no exception: "The importance of Manzoni is that he was the first of his kind to unify our country linguistically. The *Promessi Sposi* is a finely honed fresco of our history and a major pillar of our literature. I consider it so important that I take my students through it, reading the passages myself to them...on first impact, *any* youngster needs to be guided. But once they get into it, they've got a long term gift. This is a book that will keep them company for the rest of their lives, on each rereading".

Manzoni's Lecco of the 1600s had 5000-6000 inhabitants, mostly relegated to districts according to their skills – fishermen traditionally settling at the shoreside Pescarenico, while Acquate and Olate were areas home to copper and brass craftsmen and manual labourers. As Lecco expanded to some 47,000 of our day, those demarcation lines blurred and the city now is a checkerboard of the beautiful alongside the less beautiful.

The city was quick off the mark in recent times to put up brown arrows, as a sort of "Manzoni Trail", steering Promessi Sposi devotees from one site to the next. All in pure speculation, of course, because the author was coy about getting dragged into a pinpointing game. A few of his districts were clear cut. But the actual *homes* of his characters, their churches, their escape routes were invention. To those who cornered him to confirm or deny, Manzoni would smile and answer, "Keep on looking, keep on looking". But the City Fathers were not to be deterred. They gave new names to the streets, straight out of the novel. Thus there is a Via Lucia, a Via Renzo and a Via Don Rodrigo. And it doesn't end there. Lecco has a Promessi Sposi Hotel and a Don Abbondio Hotel. A local *pasticceria* confections *Baci di Lucia* and *Renzini e le Luzie*, gobbled up by the gullible.

The literary faithful here sportingly move through a well-marked itinerary shepherding them from the Saints Vitale e Valeria Church in Olate on to the church of Pescarenico, to the brooding castle remains allegedly of the Unnamed, a few kilometres south, at Vercurago and thence to two Lucia homes. Curiously, as local historian Gian Luigi Daccó observes, homes have been "found" for just about all the novel's characters except its principal one, Renzo. "Who knows why, but no one has ever guessed at where he lived. Even for the most attentive reader, the clues were too vague. Manzoni only hints at two places. Indeed, just when he might have given us some further clues, he veers off on a botanical tangent...a great passion of his".

The lure of Lake Lecco (the other prong of this inverted "Y" shaped body of water is Lake Como) has cast its spell on many, not just Manzoni. Plinys the Elder and Younger sought inspiration here. Stendhal wrote poetically about "the oak groves, so green, that dip to bathe their branches in the waves." Shelley, too, came to visit. Today, one sees magnificent villas and manicured formal gardens in evidence of love still felt for the area.

Swans paddle along the lakeside and coracle-like boats ply the waters. And yet, it is Manzoni who always will come to mind at Lecco, even reverberating far beyond the town. Follow the wriggles of the Adda River, just south of Lecco, which eventually flows into the Po at Cremona. Leaving the main road at Villa d'Adda, head serendipitously down the hill towards the water. If you are lucky, you will see a little boat powered entirely by pulleys, plying quietly back and forth between the two banks of the river. The captain? Well, no, he *isn't* the wily single oarsman of the book. And among the passengers, is that Renzo there, making his way to safety? Maybe not. But why not indulge in a little bit of fantasy.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ITALIAN VILLAGE: A MEMOIR

by Alessandro Roselli

I awoke early that morning to the sound of a bang just outside my window. Then another and another. I wasn't afraid. It was simply the start of a great day, the day of the patron saint of the village, namely the feast of Santa Rufina. All those bangs were of the *mortaretti* or firecrackers. And they were set off in remembrance of the servicemen of Santa Rufina killed in the two world wars. A few minutes later, I jumped out of bed to watch the scene below my window. There was the *sindaco*, the mayor, together with the military brass, paying tribute before the small monument of the Fallen on one side of the square, laying a wreath and reciting a few prayers under the guidance of the *parroco*, the parish priest. The monument itself was curious: the dead were all listed in alphabetical order with the exception of one Roselli whose name appeared at the very top. Meanwhile, a band played *La canzone del Piave*, so symbolic of Italian military valour during the darkest hours of the First World War.

The band had just arrived, weaving its way through the narrow streets, then stopping in front of our palazzo on the square. It was not a band such as is seen in this country, resplendent in bright jackets, shiny brass and military bearing. No. This group was slightly dishevelled, its members ranging in age between 15 and 70. And actually, they came from a neighbouring town because we didn't boast a band all of our own. Still, they were very serious and every year, they played the same tunes which I know by heart.

In early July 1953, the *fiesta* was even greater than usual: the Bishop of L'Aquila degli Abruzzi was present because Santa Rufina fell within his diocese. He was trailed by an entourage of maybe 20-25 friars and priests for the unveiling of a new mosaic on the façade of Santa Maria del Popolo, the old village church, itself on the square just across from our palazzo. The simple rustic front of the church now bore these large brand new, brightly coloured images. There were two of them representing the sisters-martyrs-saints Rufina and Seconda. And they were *un pugno nell'occhio*, or a bit of an eyesore. Even today, after so many years, when I see that deep blue background from which the two girl-martyrs appear to be emerging, it takes me back to that eventful day of July 1953.

Who would be laying on lunch that day for the illustrious guest and the attending brigade? It was *nonna*, my grandmother. Who did the honours excellently. A great number of chickens had had their necks wrung the previous day. Mind you, they were the real *galline ruspanti*, courtyard chickens, a delicacy one brought out only on special occasions. Today's battery chickens, needless to say, simply did not exist back then. Mountains and mountains of *fettuccine al ragù* using chicken livers had been prepared by the village's most able cooks. In the dining room of our house, a big horse-shoe table was prepared. In the centre, my *nonna* and the Bishop would sit. On the opposite side, the seats were assigned to my father and to one of my uncles, who had married one of the seven daughters of *nonna*. Being the oldest men in the family (my grandmother was a long-time widow of a judge, who I never knew), they were in charge of entertaining the Bishop. I was assigned to the very edge of the horse-shoe and enjoyed looking at those priests. They were country-folk who, partly because they were young and partly because they were really hungry (poverty still reigned in

the countryside), put aside rules of good behaviour and really tucked in to the food. The long beard of one friar, I remember, got sort of tangled up with the food. And thus cutlery became, at a certain point, rather useless.

The lunch, or more precisely, the banquet left everyone rather dizzy. Our local home-made wine (later on deemed by my brother as "very good," by my father as "passable" and by me "revolting") had the same effect on the whole village. It was time for a nap, a *riposino*. Only in the late afternoon did the feast resume with the biggest religious event of the day, the *processione*. The long and pious procession through the streets was led by the *sindaco* and the *parroco* and followed by town folk. In their midst was the statue of the Madonna del Popolo. Litanies, candles, men and women all dressed up, members of the *Confraternita della Misericordia* in long red and blue garb with large caps. Our role was to lean out from the arches of the house's big loggia and to hang out rugs in sign of reverence. All this because the procession would stop right in front of our home. At that point, the statue of the Madonna would be turned around three times by members of the *Confraternita*. As they rotated her, they would dip a bit, too, in a kind of dance. This ritual harks back to the pagan Roman dance, the *saltarello*.

At this point, firecrackers began to explode again – this time in a sign of joy. The litanies of the women would reach their climax. This was the highest point of the day. The sun was sinking below the cerulean hills on the other side of the valley and every year, at this moment, we would light up the Chinese lanterns in the loggia. To us children, the sight of those paper lanterns in all possible colours was pure enchantment. Such a pity that these fragile antiques have been lost. The summer sky, by this time, had turned dark blue, dappled by glittering stars. The fireworks – Roman candles, bengals – may have been modest, but to me, they were wonderful as they lit up our garden for a few fleeting seconds, so that you could see every single plant.

What survives today? The village has changed. The Cassa del Mezzogiorno brought money and jobs, maybe not many, but certainly enough to raise the standard of living. The town expanded in size, while agriculture retreated and with it, the rural character of the place. More and more, Santa Rufina resembles a suburb of Rome, even though it is 90 kilometres away. The traditional reddish ox-drawn carts have been replaced by another sort of tractor, the "Chelsea tractor." Some industries live on, even though the Cassa ceased to exist. Increasingly, it is a commuter town, with workers headed to Rome. And Rome brings money into Santa Rufina. Crime, generally petty crime, is on the increase (our palazzo there has been burgled of all its furniture). The feast of Santa Rufina is still celebrated. But the traditional band has been replaced by a rock band. The religious rites are still performed but the indifference of the people is palpable. We do not stay for the festivities there anymore. The horrible din of the rock band right in front of our palazzo lasting until 1:00 a.m. drives us far away.

Yet, I have no regrets. Santa Rufina was very picturesque, but the poverty and neglect were appalling. We might have had a different kind of development, but this is true for several other parts of our country. Probably only economic, social or political historians can say why this hasn't happened.

THE CHAIRMAN WALKS

by Charles de Chassiron

In early September 2009, our chairman Charles de Chassiron joined about thirty others, including BIS members Nick Gent and Letitia Blake, to take part in this year's Monte San Martino Freedom Trail in north-west Italy. The Monte San Martino Trust was founded in 1989 by former British servicemen to commemorate the friendships formed and deep debt of gratitude owed by Allied soldiers in the last phase of World War II to the Italian partisans and civilians who risked their lives to help both escaped prisoners and Special Forces personnel parachuted into German-occupied Italy. The Trust provides bursaries for young Italians whose families helped in this way, or who come from areas where such help was given, to enable them to study in the UK. One of the ways used to raise funds since 2001 has been the Trail, where sponsored walkers follow one of the routes used by escaped POWs. This year's route was on mule tracks from Pontremoli in Lunigiana, Northern Tuscany, to Levanto on the coast of Liguria, a distance of about 60 kilometres, crossing two mountain ranges of up to 1000 metres over three days. We asked Charles to keep a diary.

Day one (September 8)

By Easyjet to Pisa, and cloudless all the way. Picked up with others by Brian Lett, the organiser of the Trail and ex-chairman of the Trust, and arrived at the base hotel outside the old town of Pontremoli. The group seems a pleasant mix, though not all will actually walk all the way. Nick Young, the current chairman, has chronic back problems and cannot, though he appears and greets us warmly. We start with an enjoyable and lengthy dinner to mark Armistice Day in 1943, when about 25,000 Allied prisoners were released into the surrounding countryside. Brian gives his first speech, recalling the selfless help given to his father and many others – several other sons and daughters are present – by ordinary Italians. Only one actual veteran is present this time, a sprightly 89-year-old called Bernard Collier, who after dinner played the mandolin, an instrument he had learnt in the prison camp at Sulmona, after capture in North Africa. Ex-General Dany Bucchioni, the partisan commander commanding in the district next to the international unit headed by Brian's escaped father, Major Gordon Lett, is also present – an even more upright 92-year-old. His great-nephew Omar (an ex bursary-holder and now a lawyer in UK) is one of the trail marshals, responsible for transporting us and baggage. To bed in a comfortable room lit by moonlight, with the Apuan Alps visible in the distance.

Day two (September 9)

A day of ceremonies rather than walking – to the mild frustration of some. Started with a swim at 7 a.m., but could not get back into the locked hotel until a breakfast waitress let me in. Spent time getting to know Bernard, who told me of having been recaptured by the Germans, shipped to Bohemia, and liberated by the Russians in May 1945 – to be handed a gun, asked to hop on a tank, and invited to help in a final attack, which he did. Off to the day's first wreath-laying ceremony, up at the memorial near the Passo della Cisa marking the spot – today a peaceful subalpine field – where two SAS men were shot after capture behind the lines by the Germans. Only two of their group of six survived. One of the SAS men impressed one of his captors so much that he called him "the bravest English officer I met in all my life". Among our group is a latter-day SAS or strictly speaking SBS veteran who tells me of his time in Afghanistan in the 1980s on a similar mission. After a lazy lunch, sampling the local pasta, testaroli

with pesto, in Pontremoli – a town much more important six centuries and more ago than now, because of its position on the pilgrim road to Rome – we drive to a second ceremony in Ponzano Magra down the valley near La Spezia, where two other captured SAS men had been shot. A group of ancient partisans attend, with their ANPI neckerchiefs on, as a local councillor speaks of how schoolchildren are brought here to learn what happened 60 plus years ago, when a free Italy was being born. Another very moving experience. And tomorrow the real walk starts.

Day three (September 10)

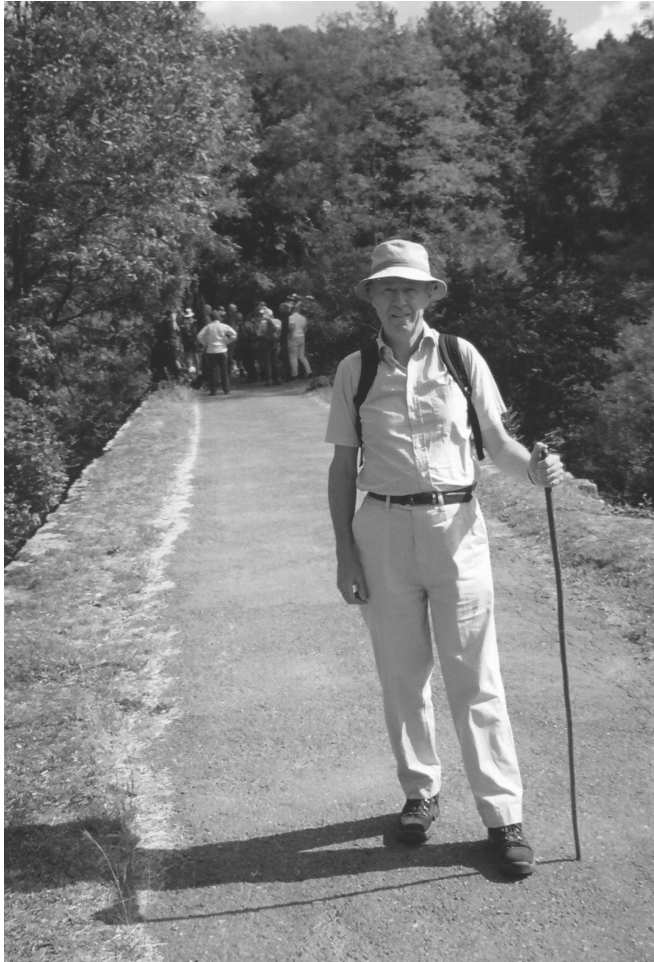
Today we 'flee' from Pontremoli to Rossano, where so many once sought refuge in the hidden valley. It is about 15 kms, taking seven hours or so in warm sunny weather, up the lanes from Pontremoli, under the autostrada, and then following our CAI guide up the old mule trails up and over a 980 metre ridge, via several semi-deserted villages. Many of the young have left to seek work, as agriculture does not pay. We are well shaded by chestnut forests most of the way. Our first (and in fact only) dropout: a portly academic (as Brian says, much better to admit it than collapse later en route and require a potentially inconvenient mountain rescue nowhere near roads). A further short ceremony at the memorial to commemorate Brian's father's unit, listing the nationalities: Poles, Russians, and many Dominion soldiers, though they are here listed as 'British Empire'. Our two Canadian walkers do not comment. We eat a hearty and meaty dinner at the Bar Adolfo, and then overnight at Brian's house, a former primary school now combining hostel-like accommodation for 25 with a museum about his father's partisan unit. Our CAI guide says we have done well, but my thighs ache. Not much sleep in my bag on a bunk bed.

Day four (September 11)

Departure at 9 a.m. on another fine morning, to a chorus of barking dogs, down to a shady and cool river valley, over a Roman bridge, and up a winding path to Bosco and the Alta Via, a ridge with a stupendous view south, even to the distant sea. Fire and smoke are visible from the many fires burning in Liguria and we wonder if they will impede us the next day. We lunch, a picnic of prosciutto rolls and fruit, as every day, and then ascend a steep Via Crucis to a hermitage on Monte Dragnone. Then on and down to the village of Sero, at 575 metres, with yet another ceremony marking the place where partisans were shot, before a fine barbecue with meat and luscious tomatoes from the local bar owner's garden. We are to sleep – in theory all of us – on the floor of the bar, on mattresses transported here by Omar. But one or two have gone back to the comfortable Pontremoli hotel, and we men decide to leave the bar floor to the ladies, taking ourselves off to the small vineyard next door to sleep under the stars. This time I do sleep – a bit anyway – but the church clock and the dogs wake me about 4 a.m., so I watch the bright stars and reflect that I last did this in 1969, on the night men landed on the moon. We are a jolly crew, and the camaraderie – and awareness of what courage and hardships we are commemorating – gets us past the minor discomfort of no showers and only one loo.

Day five (September 12)

The final day of the 'escape to the sea', the route taken by many prisoners, a slog of over 25 kms ahead. Start time is 7.30 a.m.



The Chairman Walks (photo by courtesy of Charles de Chassiron)

but it slips a bit. We drop down from Sero to cross the river Vara and the Genoa-Livorno autostrada at Brugnato, led by local members of Mangia Trekking who treat it as Saturday stroll – which it is for them. They peel off at Brugnato, but we have various Levantesi with us from the start, including Michael Nathanson, another ex-prisoner's son and almost an honorary citizen of Levanto. These paths were used by groups of escaped prisoners in 1944 heading for evacuation by sea. We climb endlessly, up and over the last mountain ridge, slowed by the near-collapse of one of the Levantese ladies, fortunately quite near an agriturismo which means she can be rescued by vehicle. We descend, watching yellow fire-fighting aircraft flying down past us to pick up more water before their repeated runs, and after eight hours of hiking we walk, tired but triumphant, into Levanto. No brass bands, as half-promised beforehand, but we do all participate in a fine ceremony in the piazza with the Sindaco and local worthies. Brian had asked me to say a few words at the subsequent dinner, mainly about the BIS, but also to read out a nice message sent by the Prince of Wales and printed in the programme.

To my horror I hear my name announced in the piazza, before the dinner, and have to grab a programme from a bystander and read it out in both languages – promising publicly to tell the Prince's private secretary, who is an ex-FCO colleague, that I have done so (I keep the promise later). To my relief Michael lets me have a shower in his hotel room before we all assemble for the final dinner, an array of fried seafood at the Trattoria Cavour. Then back by minibus and already half-asleep to the original hotel, but for another short night's sleep, as I have to

leave for Pisa with others very early for the return flight next day. Curiously my legs do not feel tired and my feet have not bothered me at all.

Day six (September 13)

My flight is not until early afternoon, so I have time to go into Pisa and visit the 'complesso monumentale', milling with tourists but a stupendous sight – especially the cemetery, which I had not seen before. Then a tedious series of queues in Pisa airport, but the plane is again on time home. Now to e-mail my sponsors to collect the promised several hundred pounds worth of funds for the Trust. My children seem impressed that I have actually 'done it'. The really impressive thing, however, is the intense consciousness I feel of the humanity and courage of the ordinary Italians who selflessly helped and sheltered so many hundred soldiers, despite reprisals, shootings and brutal 'rastrellamenti', or sweeps through their areas. The Trust's work has never seemed so worthwhile.

For more details about the Monte San Martino Trust, please see www.msmtrust.org.uk

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PANETTONE: THE QUINTESSENTIAL ITALIAN CAKE – AND NOT ONLY AT CHRISTMAS!

by Alexandra Richardson

I still remember the very first bite of that golden delicacy decades ago in Milan, on a grey and foggy December afternoon just before Christmas. The texture was light and fluffy. Despite the dotting of raisins and candied fruit, it wasn't overly sweet. The yellow dough pulled away in long, pliant strands in my fingers like no other bread I knew. It went down nicely with my cup of tea that day. The second slice rounded off my evening meal, while a third was toasted the next morning for breakfast. By then, I was hooked on this ambrosia *ambrosiano*, panettone, and I have never looked back. I am in good company, for some 117 million of them are turned out yearly, worth 580 million euros. Mostly they are consumed in Italy. But luckily for us, a lot are exported too.

Panettone has not *always* been big business. For centuries, in fact, the humble predecessors of today's panettone were squat, homely one-pound loaves prepared in Lombardy homes, usually under the strict supervision of the master or mistress of the house. White flour was employed in towns, while in the countryside the more prevalent cornmeal was used. Such trimmings as could be scraped together – sugar, raisins, honey, peppercorns, candied pumpkin – were mixed in to enrich the dough. And just before it went into the oven, a cross, a sign of blessing, was incised on the surface. With that, families could sit down, at least once a year, and tuck into something special, something "extravagant." And that usually meant at Christmas.

By the 1800s, these early confections had caught on in the more affluent households as well. Fashionable Milan bakeries began turning out ever-more "stylish" cakes for the rich, enhanced by eggs and butter. But at six Lire per loaf – or three times the daily wage of the average worker – business did not exactly boom.

It would take a 10-year old coachman's son from Gessate Milanese to change all that when he set off from home at the turn of the (20th) century to seek his fortune in the Lombard capital. After an inauspicious first night camped out on a public bench in piazza Duomo, the young Angelo Motta found work as a backroom helper in a bakery. In time, he learned the pastry trade there, making his way up the ladder. Following military service in The Great War, he returned to Milan and with his savings, opened his own little bakery in Via Chiusa. For the first two years, Motta continued to make the heavy version of the cake. But he felt that there was room for change.

The "change" was nothing short of a revolution, at least to Milanese palates: henceforth the 31-year old Motta decreed that his *new* panettone would swell into a cylindrical toque blanche-shaped confection. Adopting somewhat different ingredients and steps would yield a lighter, fluffier product, light years away from the original. The revised version caught on fast and suddenly others jumped on the bandwagon. Gino Alemagna came forth with his own panettone, made on the premises of a newly-opened shop in Via Paolo Sarpi; before long, all of the traditional pastry shops and bakeries in Milan went over to the dome-topped Christmas cake.

With the new panettone came a handful of "old" legends, as fresh out of the oven as the cakes themselves! One story had

panettone's pedigree going back to the late 1400s, during the time of Lodovico il Moro. The young and well-to-do Ughetto degli Atellani fell in love with a baker's daughter, Adalgisa. The two met secretly at night in the bakery where she was busy with the next day's output. Business was drooping because of a rival bakery nearby and the two lovers had to devise a way to improve her papa's fortunes. Ughetto's recipe for success with the bakery and his loved one was to start enriching the cakes with candied fruit and eggs. As Christmas approached, he made one final improvement: raisins were added to the dough. The bakery's fortunes were indeed reversed with this panettone. And, naturally, Ughetto and Adalgisa lived happily ever after. Yet another legend attributes the recipe to a dishwasher named Toni in the court of Lodovico. At one banquet of the latter, the dessert course was accidentally burnt to a crisp. In stepped the provident Toni with an improvised pudding that he had furtively made with leftover pastry dough together with the familiar extras. And *voilà*, you guessed it, Pan del Toni.

Folklore aside, though, popularity grew. And so did competition. More small-scale producers were eager for a slice of the action, prompting both Motta and Alemagna to sharpen the knives. Indeed, the two allegedly met in secret over a glass of wine, to plot measures that would curb their competitors as well as expand their own respective empires. New outlets mushroomed. With great flourish, Popes were presented with outsized specials at Christmas-time. With careful orchestration and, of course, plenty of photographers on hand, Motta himself distributed 12-kilo jumbo cakes to famed bicycle champions after races. In many companies, panettone became the *de rigueur* holiday gift to give to all of one's staff. Top artists were commissioned to immortalize them in advertisements. Prices were slashed to attract yet more consumers.

By the 1950s, not only was this holiday delicacy being exported to 75 countries around the world, but was gaining wider acceptance within Italy. No longer was it purely Milanese. Now *all* of Italy wanted a slice. Bauli, Tre Marie, Melegatti and others came on stage to join Motta and Alemagna in giving the customers what they wanted. Indeed today more panettoni are consumed in central and southern Italy than is in Milan! In another gradual shift in social tastes, panettoni were no longer purchased exclusively in December for Christmas. People began discovering that the cake was a nice indulgence you could eat at any time of the year— much in the same way as the English at last decided that hot cross buns didn't have to come out of the ovens at Easter-time alone.

The experts have a few tips for maximum enjoyment of this special treat: check the production date on the box before purchase to ensure that yours is of a current batch and not remaindered from an older vintage. Put the unwrapped cake near, but not in or on, a warm spot for several hours so that the ingredients will be at room temperature. Lastly, after each use, wrap the remaining panettone up carefully to prevent it from drying out.

Buon appetito.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO ALL WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN L'AQUILA AND SURROUNDING AREAS

by Georgina Gordon-Ham

As the silence of the night reigned over central Italy, the earth trembled around 3.30 in the morning local time on 6th April when many were hit by the rage of an unforgiving earthquake. Some people managed to flee whilst others were crushed to death under the rubble or buried alive. Homes and historical buildings were reduced to fragments of stone just in seconds. Voices crying out for help could be heard amidst dust and debris where people were trapped under collapsed buildings. A reign of terror overcast the region. "It was the apocalypse", were the words of one survivor. "It was like the end of the world", cried out another, "It was hell. We just ran down the stairs in our pyjamas and out into the streets. It was incredible." Those of us who have experienced earthquakes with slight tremors in Italy or elsewhere may have been alarmed by just seeing the ceiling and floor rock, which is nothing compared to the terrifying experiences of the people of Abruzzo.

The medieval historical and university town of L'Aquila was at the epicentre of the 6.3 magnitude on the Richter scale whose tremors stretched across central Italy affecting to lesser degrees Rome just 60 miles away and the Tyrrhenian Sea right across to the Adriatic. L'Aquila and surrounding areas received the worst damage and death tolls. The first pieces of news announced at least 150 dead and 1,500 injured who included men, women and children of all ages. Figures rose relentlessly throughout that day, and days to come totaling over 300 dead and thousands homeless. I am sure many of us knew somebody there, either friends or family or both and were anxious to have the continually updated list of names of survivors. Some family friends who live up in the hills near Carsoli forty kilometres from L'Aquila slept in their car for a few days until the tremors subdued. The tragedy was to find out that from one day to another, from one hour to another, from one minute to another your whole life had changed and you had nothing left, and least of all a roof over your head. I am sure many of us remember the scene of the official funeral when a solemn Mass was celebrated before rows and rows of coffins of the people who had so tragically passed away. And also those touching scenes of white coffins (in Italy this is the custom for denoting the coffin of a child), placed on top of or next to a coffin of a mother or a relative. Friends and relatives stood sobbing as they gathered around their dear ones. An event I myself will never forget as I was professionally involved in the media that day when I had to report as an interpreter and yet withhold my emotions refraining from any personal 'interpretation' of the facts.

The Abruzzo region is a seismically active area which has suffered earthquakes throughout the centuries. Apart from great human loss, cultural heritage was also badly affected. Many medieval and Renaissance buildings and famous churches in the central region of Abruzzo bore heavy damage. The latest report from the Beni Culturali says 45 historical buildings were affected, such as the bell tower of L'Aquila's Basilica of San Bernardino and the walls of the Basilica of Santa

Maria di Collemaggio as well as the castle hosting the region's national museum. Much of L'Aquila's city centre was reduced to rubble. The dome of Santa Maria Paganica, a 13th century church, collapsed. The nearby village of Onna with just over 300 inhabitants was almost leveled to the ground. One of the victims of the earthquake was Mario Papola, the last surviving witness of the 1944 Nazi bloodshed in the village. The walls of the main church of Carsoli*, a town in Abruzzo on the border with Lazio, was badly damaged by the earthquake. The incident soon brought its citizens together in a community spirit to restore it on mass to its original state. "Ci siamo rimboccati le maniche" was one man's proud comment.

Our thoughts go out to all those people, their families and the rescuers who worked so hard to save who and what they could. Barracks, stadiums, gym centres and public halls had been converted into temporary dormitories, whilst the 'Tendopoli' was being set up for the homeless. According to the latest reports, the tent city is planned to be dismantled in view of the fast approaching seasonal weather conditions. The threefold strategy is to allow some people to return to their homes, whilst a second group will be hosted in pre-fabricated houses and a third group will be put up in local hotels. The aftermath of the earthquake has left a human and cultural tragedy which may take years to heal.



Via San Domenico in the centre of L'Aquila: home in ruins of Dario Pallotta, member of the town's rugby team (photo by courtesy of Dario Pallotta)

* The author recently visited the church of Carsoli (photos) and saw it restored to its former glory having been told how its inhabitants literally rolled up their sleeves making sure everything was put back to its original state.

The British-Italian Society have given a donation, as promised at the AGM, of 550 euros towards the costs of the children's books for the primary school library at Ocre, Abruzzo, following the severe damage from last April's earthquake.

ITALY – IS NOT JUST FOR THE ITALIANS!

by Stephen Porter

Italy is in some ways my spiritual home, since, although I have no Italian blood, two of my male relatives married into Italian families (one in Naples in the 1940s and the other in Milan in the 1960s) and, as a child, I had the immense good fortune to spend part of almost every summer there.

In the mid 1950s, arriving from grey, foggy, post-war England, where little boys had to be seen and not heard, Italy was a magical wonderland where little frogs like me were instantly and automatically turned into princes who could do no wrong. The Italians seemed to be deaf, blind and insensitive to any of the many of the faults which little boys possess and, to this day, I am forced to smile when I think of the charming and indulgent way they responded to my undoubted naughtiness and misbehaviour, which in England would have been met with stern looks and even the occasional smack.

Although, by English standards, my father was by no means a disciplinarian, he at first used to try to impose the same regime on holiday in Italy as he would have in England but he was very quickly forced to give up. To Italians, small boys were expected to be naughty – it showed spirit – and most errant acts, other than perhaps homicide, could be easily and quickly forgiven. And I suspect that even if a small boy did actually kill someone, there would be a coterie of well-intentioned adults who would probably have testified that he was driven to it by over-strict parental discipline! I distinctly remember all of the incidents which first drew my attention to the acute difference between Italy and England in the attitude to children's behaviour. One was particularly memorable.

It was around 1956, I was only about 7 or 8 years old and, as usual, I was the last to get washed and dressed for dinner, which, unlike in an English hotel, I was expected to take with my parents at about 9pm in the dining room of the rather grand hotel where we were staying in Liguria. My parents and my elder brother had already gone through into the capacious dining room which was almost the size of a ballroom, on one side of which, there stood an enormous serving table with a magnificent array of antipasti and rows of huge cold poached fish with mayonnaise and salads. Not immediately seeing my parents and running full pelt across the polished marble floor, I suddenly slipped, fell and slid at high speed towards the over-laden table and, putting out my hand to steady myself, I caught hold of the white linen tablecloth on which all the magnificent dishes lay, thereby bringing the whole lot cascading to the floor with an almighty crash, whilst I as if it had all been a rehearsed circus stunt, slid further and under the table!

At first the silence was deafening. But as I peered out, I remember thinking it might not be quite as bad as I feared because I noticed the head waiter in his very formal starched white shirt and tails seemed to be laughing. A second later, *everyone* was laughing and then they all started clapping, as if I had, indeed, performed some expertly-executed trick and the clapping seemed to go on for ever. I remember very well all these years later thinking at that moment, "I like this place," a sentiment which, whenever I am in Italy, (which is never frequently enough!) I can never help repeating ad infinitum!

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THE SILKMAKERS OF CORTALE

by Alexandra Richardson

Two thousand feet high in the Calabrian mountains of Italy lies one couple's personal Nirvana. It is the tiny village of Cortale, in the province of Catanzaro, where Maria Anna and Nicola Procopio, both 49 years old, have fulfilled their greatest ambition against all the odds. These two plucky Calabrians have single-handedly revived their village's vanished art of silk-making.

Scarcely a half-century ago, Cortale was known throughout Calabria simply as "Silk town." Virtually every family possessed a loom on which daughters' dowries of rich bedding and table coverings were woven. Humble folk, the *cortalesi* could not afford big-city prices. And, besides, tradition was tradition. Such things were always made at home.

Starting in the 1950s, however, with the mass move to jobs in the north, the younger generations virtually disappeared and, with them, too, the demand for the precious soft furnishings designed to last a lifetime. But the Procopios remembered the looms that their families had used and decided to reverse that vanishing craft with a little guidance from their respective parents. They'd go even further: they would carry out the entire production cycle, beginning with the silkworms. The couple amassed old equipment given to them by their families and from other sources throughout Italy – looms no longer wanted, wonderful old spidery spools, bathing tanks and a lot of clackety-clack machinery. Calabria, like Tuscany, Liguria and the Veneto, just to name a few examples, had always had a silk industry either large or small. Thus mulberry trees were always near to hand. Before long, those surviving around Cortale were pressed back into service with silkworms munching away voraciously at the leaves. Cocoons started multiplying and those noisy machines began transforming cocoons into skeins of various-weighted bundles of thread.



Maria Anna Procopio examining a basket of silkworm cocoons



The machinery at Dal Baco alla Seta continues to churn out silk

"It was very slow getting off the ground," recalls Nicola. Sadly, no significant help whatsoever was forthcoming from either the Region or the province to promote their efforts or to help them cover costs. "Basically," he added, "we had to rely entirely on ourselves to make this work." This is now called "Dal Baco alla Seta," an exquisite little boutique on Cortale's sleepy little main street, the Via Senatore Todaro, where their company is also based. The showroom displays a wide range of their wares, from lampshades to bedcovers, table mats and cushion covers. The weave designs vary but the favoured colour is mostly a natural cream hue. Because they are so large, the looms are quartered outside town at more spacious premises.

From time to time, the Procopios come down from their mountain top to participate in trade and craft fairs. They are training a handful of local youngsters in the skills they themselves have had to learn. Never short of dreams, the next project on their wish list will be to open a museum devoted to the history of Calabrian silk production, to be based in nearby Catanzaro.

Dal Baco alla Seta
Via Senatore Todaro 4
88020 Cortale (Cz)
tel: 0968 76601

PINO ORIOLI: A FORGOTTEN LITERARY LINK BETWEEN ITALY AND BRITAIN

by Alessandro Roselli

The Via Ricasoli in Florence is a long, narrow street leading from Santa Maria del Fiore to the Galleria dell'Accademia where Michelangelo's David is on view. A few steps further along is the Convent of San Marco, where Fra' Angelico's paintings illustrate Gospel scenes. The street is usually awash with tourists, shuttling between the Cattedrale and those world-famous places. Few visitors, however, probably take any notice of the small shop front on the right hand side, going north, displaying pages from old or antiquarian books in its windows. This is the Libreria Gonnelli.

Inside is a large surviving stock of books of the Lungarno Series editions. Not, I confess, exactly a household name. In fact, until a few years ago, not even I was familiar with it. In a way, though, these editions are symbolic and hark back to the literary connections between Italy and Britain, albeit almost completely forgotten.

This small publishing house of the late 1920s and 30s did not survive its founder and *deus ex-machina* and indeed ceased to exist after the publication of only 12 books. All were in English and copies of the limited output were all individually numbered. The high prices that these books often command today on the antiquarian market is partly due to their rarity, but even more importantly, to the quality of the writers involved. Some of the most important British authors of the first half of the twentieth century were connected to this publisher, most notably Lawrence and his "Lady Chatterley's Lover," which was first printed privately in Florence in 1928 – long before it was permitted to be published in Lawrence's own country.

The publisher would be brought to trial for one book of the Lungarno Series and amazingly, it was *not* the title mentioned above but rather "The Last of the Medici," an English translation by the Anglo-Florentine aesthete Harold Acton of an 18th century pamphlet on Gian Gastone de' Medici, introduced by Norman Douglas. In due course, the publisher was acquitted.

How did the connection all begin between this modest, self-made Italian publisher, Giuseppe (Pino) Orioli, and *la crème* of British literary life? It was partly to do with the fascination that Florence and, more generally, Italy exercised on the cultured Englishman ever since the days of the Grand Tour. And partly it was thanks to the very unusual Mr. Orioli himself.

I shall not dwell on the first reason other than to observe that British intellectuals were drawn to Italy for its sense of pagan freedom such as was not seen at home. Escaping to Italy was a flight to a better climate and to full blown Epicurean hedonism, unbound by convention. A paradox, considering the traditionalism and Catholicism of those times? Not really, because these people ignored the élite, and indeed the literary circles, preferring contact, instead, with the lower echelons of society, deemed to be more natural and less constrained.

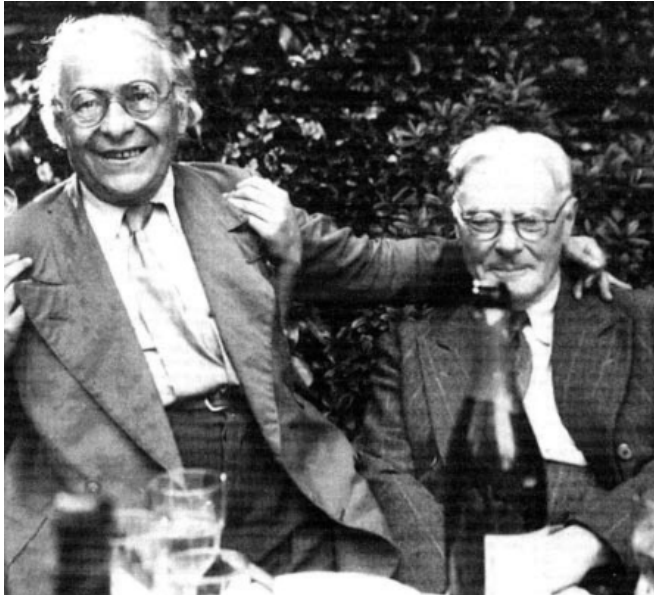
Pino Orioli wrote two books and what we know about him derives mostly from them. In addition, there was an English author, Richard Aldington, who wrote a curious book, "Pinorman. Personal recollections of Norman Douglas, Pino Orioli and Charles Prentice," that basically describes a series of rather singular encounters – sometimes funny, other times harsh – among these three and the author in Florence and elsewhere in Tuscany. According to both Aldington and a review which appeared in The Times Literary Supplement, Orioli's books were re-written by his friend Douglas in the latter's own style and "almost all Pino's special and unique quality was lost in second-rate Norman Douglas narrative." Elsewhere, Aldington adds that "Pino as a writer is far below Pino as an actor and story-teller." Given the limited literary output of Orioli, we will never know just how much this opinion was due to a sympathy for the uninhibited vitality of Orioli and the bitter-sweet rapport with Douglas. Orioli's books have a certain stylistic resemblance to the writing of Douglas. His "Moving Along" (1934) is a diary of a journey to southern Italy and particularly to Calabria, unaccidentally in the company of Norman Douglas. The similarities to "Old Calabria" show up their ties to one another. It is worth noting that this book of Orioli's, as well as the second one, was published by Charles Prentice then himself working for Chatto and Windus.

The other book by Orioli is an autobiography, "Adventures of a Bookseller"¹ and is quite a singular story. He was born in 1884 at Alfonsine, between Ferrara and Ravenna, in Emilia-Romagna. It is the only place to have perpetuated his memory by naming the local library after him. He wrote that he narrowly escaped the lunatic asylum as his birthplace because his mother, who spent time within, had been sent home just before his birth: a mouse had run up her leg and the shock had brought her to her senses. His father confected pork products and developed a sausage called the "bel e cot" that brought in good earnings until financial collapse occurred. Pino learned to shave and cut hair at Alfonsine, a skill later used in Florence.

There in Florence a married woman with a hare-lip fell in love with him, trying seduction. He rejected her advances neither out of Catholic principles nor because of her ugliness, but rather because of unconquerable *horror foeminae*. On another similar occasion, he would say, referring to his father, "He would have marry me, zhat bloody man, to a vumman!" By 20, Orioli went to Paris, then on to London. Struck there by flowery wallpaper, windows that did not open and shut well and a paste called porridge, he got gradually acquainted with the English way of life, finally obtaining employment with a Polish antiquarian in Shaftsbury Avenue. Eventually, he started his own book trading, buying in Cambridge and selling at a profit in London with Irving Davis as a business partner.

The two would open a bookshop in Via dei Vecchietti, Florence, in 1910. But when they both fell in love with the same "creature,"

¹ Giuseppe Orioli, "Adventures of a Bookseller," Lungarno Series, Florence, 1937. A commercial edition was published by Chatto and Windus, London in 1938. Hardback, pp329. No reprint, to my knowledge. An Italian version was published by Il Polifilo, Milan, 1988.



Pino Orioli and Norman Douglas

they feared it would put an end to their friendship and decided to move back to London in 1913, where they opened a bookshop in Museum Street. When Italy entered the Great War, Orioli was called up by the Army and returned to Italy. It was back home that he discovered just how removed he had become from his own country. On the death of his father, not a tear was shed: "I was ultra-English, cold and heartless."

After the war, back in London, business thrived and he met the social elite, like Dame Laura Knight and the ballerina Lydia Lopokova who went on to marry John Maynard Keynes. But the need to be independent in the antiquarian book trade would send him back to Florence in 1920, with a new small shop on the Lungarno Acciaiuoli between Ponte Vecchio and Ponte Santa Trinità. Later, it would move to Lungarno Corsini.

It was then that his editorial career got most interesting as he made contact with the British literary and social set of Florence. He met Norman Douglas in 1922 with whom he was linked in a close friendship that ended bitterly a few years before Orioli's death. The two lived in the same building at 14 Lungarno alle Grazie. He also met D.H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Lytton Strachey, Nancy Cunard. In 1928, Orioli published Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, although it was not part of the Lungarno Series. According to one controversial view, he wasn't even the publisher but rather a sort of technical superintendent of production. Orioli then published "Nerinda," by Douglas. Likewise, it was not part of the Lungarno Series. In fact, the Series began in 1929 with Lawrence ("The Story of Doctor Manente" 1929; "The Virgin and the Gipsy" 1930; "Young Lorenzo" 1931; "Apocalypse" 1931; "Last Poems" 1931), Aldington ("Stepping Heavenward" 1931), Somerset Maugham ("The Book Bag" 1932), McGillivray ("Norman Douglas" 1933) and his own "Adventures of a Bookseller" 1937. Profits were not what was expected and he complained about Lawrence's meanness in sharing the proceeds. Orioli called Lawrence "a homosexual gone wrong, repressed in childhood by a puritan environment." Adding to his difficulties was the fact that his printer knew not a word of English which meant an incredible amount of proof-reading. Aldington unforgivingly added that the Lungarno Series books were without charm, their typeset legible but dull, the paper solid but yellowish, the binding thick and heavy. He was right. However, they did have the aura of craftsmanship and personal care and there were no

typographical errors! With the fall of the pound in the late 1930s, business became unprofitable and Orioli was induced to cease the Lungarno Series.

His autobiography ended almost abruptly, leaving gaps in the latter part of his life. His friendship with Douglas became tainted by a third man, an eccentric and anachronistic type, Reginald Turner who, before dying, willed a conspicuous amount of money to Orioli. In 1939, Orioli departed for London, then moved on to Lisbon, apparently *sans* money. One is unsure why he chose Lisbon (to escape the war, maybe? Portugal remained neutral). He died there in 1942, his faithful Carletto (his shop assistant) as his only companion. By then, he had apparently been abandoned by all his friends, particularly Norman Douglas.

In the book "Venus in the Kitchen" by Douglas (that Orioli considered publishing in Lungarno but which only came out in 1952) there is a photograph of the two of them and on the side a curious epitaph, in Latin and Italian, in Douglas' handwriting: "N.D. 1868-1932, P.O. 1884-1952. *Fui non sum, Este non eritis-Fui non sono, Siete non sarete.* Douglas, much older than Orioli, had shortened his own life (he died on Capri in 1959) and extended Orioli's, who died at only 58.

Alessandro Roselli, a former central banker (Bank of Italy) and now an honorary visiting fellow at the Cass Business School of London, thinks that finance is not everything. He divides his time between Rome (mostly) and London.

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PERSONAL AND PUBLIC 'PENSIERI' ON PIAZZA DI SPAGNA

"Come to Rome. It is a scene by
which expression is overpowered;
which words cannot convey."

– Words by Percy Bysshe Shelley

Most people see Piazza di Spagna and the theatrical backdrop of the Spanish Steps from the outside as they sweep down to unfold before the Bernini fountain, La Barcaccia, and Via Condotti, whilst my first experience was from behind the walls of the Sacred Heart College, Trinità dei Monti, then a boarding school attached to the church also called the church of Santissima Trinità al Monte Pincio.

I gradually discovered how many important Anglo-Italian visitors from all walks of life had come to this part of Rome and probably still haunt the famous Via Condotti (the Bond Street of Rome), Via del Babuino, Via Margutta (the hub of the art galleries) and so many other adjacent streets. The imposing stairway had given the area a new dimension, which opened up as I went on my journey into the past. This was thanks to my introduction to the Keats and Shelley Memorial House followed later by access to its library through Sir Joseph Cheyne who was its Curator at the time. I found myself looking through endless shelves of books. I would take them down and sit at a table by a window which looked onto the steps facing up towards Trinità dei Monti. This was quite a different perspective to what I had known. Names continued to flow out of the pages and a story began to build up.

Piazza di Spagna was the main meeting place, hence it is not surprising that this area was also known in the 19th century as 'the English ghetto'. There were two famous cafés frequented by English speakers: the Caffé degli Inglesi (now gone) in Piazza di Spagna and Caffé Greco in Via Condotti where stopping for a good 'espresso' is a must. Caffé Greco prides itself on having welcomed famous visitors such as Lord Byron, the sculptor Thorvaldsen (a follower of Canova), Goethe, Buffalo Bill Cody, and several others.

We cannot forget the flow of Romantics who visited Rome and mentioned Italy in several of their works, whether this be in writings, paintings or in sketches. The painter Sir Thomas Lawrence founded the British Academy of Arts with the support of King George IV at nearby 53 Via Margutta in 1821. The poet John Keats lived for the last three months of his life in Piazza di Spagna in 1821 with his friend the painter Joseph Severn, who was later appointed British Consul in Rome in 1861 and died there in 1879. Keats was advised by his doctors and friends to seek a milder climate and Rome was considered ideal. James Clark, later physician to Queen Victoria, was living in Rome around that time and was asked to find lodgings for Joseph Severn and his friend Keats, who became one of his patients. Clark found rooms in a small 'pensione' owned by Signora Anna Angeletti at 26 Piazza di Spagna. Sir James Clark also lived in Piazza di Spagna. Their meals were sent up to their lodgings from a popular trattoria opposite Caffé Greco in the Via Condotti, the Osteria della Lepre, in Palazzo Lepri, now the shop of the jeweller Bulgari. George Gordon Byron

had also stayed at 26 Piazza di Spagna (1817). Another well known resident in that part of the city was Elizabeth Duchess of Devonshire who lived in Rome from 1810 till her death in 1824.

Some of us have strolled along and recognise the streets where other famous British and American residents in the area stayed: the Sculptor John Gibson lived in Via della Fontanella Borghese (1817); Percy Bysshe Shelley was in Via del Corso and then at 65 Via Sistina (1819); the painter J.M.W. Turner lived in Piazza Mignanelli (1819); a plaque dedicated to Sir Walter Scott at 11 Via della Mercede rests against the wall of the palazzo where he lived.

Lady Gwendoline Talbot-Borghese lived in Palazzo Borghese (1837). Edward Lear, the English artist, illustrator, author and poet lived at 39 Via del Babuino for about ten years (1837-1847) although he travelled around Italy and went back to the UK on various visits during this period. Charles Dickens visited Italy in 1844-45. He travelled with his family and stayed in Rome during the Roman Carnival and again during the Holy Week. *Pictures from Italy* are an account of his journey to Italy and Rome. William Thackeray stayed for a short time in Via Condotti and then in Via della Croce (1854); Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning stayed at 41 Via Bocca di Leone (1856); Samuel Morse, the inventor of the Morse Code stayed in Via de Prefetti (1858); the novelist George Eliot lived in Via del Babuino (1860). American novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne stayed in Via di Porta Pinciana during his tour of Europe in the 1850s. Recollections of walks in the Pincio are to be found in his novel *The Marble Faun*. Another American novelist Henry James stayed at the Hotel d'Inghilterra in Via Bocca di Leone (1869 and 1870). His book *Italian Hours* brought together the many essays which grew out of these visits to Rome and other parts of Italy. Mark Twain also stayed at this hotel which boasts names of other famous guests, who included Franz Liszt, Mendelssohn, Hans Christian Anderson and Ernest Hemingway.

It is not just people who have come and gone over the years. I remember in my school days the British Consulate used to be in Piazza di Spagna on the other side of the Steps to the Keats-Shelley Memorial House before moving to the current Embassy and Consulate premises in Via XX Settembre. For a long time the British Embassy to the Holy See used to be in Via Condotti until it moved premises in 2006.

Another change in 2006 was the departure of the French Order of the Sacred Heart nuns from Trinità dei Monti after over a hundred years, to be superseded by the Monastic Communities of Jerusalem (Fraternités Monastiques de Jérusalem), another French Order. This was a sad event since it marked the end of an era. It closed a chapter in my personal history as well.

Daniel Varè, an Italian diplomat wrote a fascinating book with a most appropriate title *Ghosts of the Spanish Steps* (1955). The steps used to be a sort of 'salotto' in the open described, as Varè recalled, by Gabriele D'Annunzio as a place "made for leisure, for amorous couples, for all those who love flowers and women and sandwiches and afternoon tea and oriental carpets!" It still is a 'salotto' especially at weekends when a mixture of tourists from all over the world and people from the outskirts of Rome flock into the square and saunter on the steps and around the fountain. Although the noise of traffic has been curbed and restricted to public transport and a few permit holders, there is still quite a bustle.

What are still standing today are: the house at 26 Piazza di Spagna, at the foot of the Spanish Steps on the right, which was secured by American and British efforts to be turned into the Keats-Shelley Memorial where the museum was opened in 1909, whereas Babington's Tea Rooms, set up in 1894 by the Misses Babington and Cargill, at No 23 are located on the left of the Steps. Also close by is All Saints, the Anglican Church, which has been standing since 1882 in Via del Babuino in its unique Gothic style.

Twice a year the Spanish Steps take on a colourful mantle: around the end of April-May a spray of azaleas covers the 'scalinata' to commemorate the blossoming of spring. The steps are covered with pots of mostly scarlet flowers from top to bottom – an unforgettable display.

Christmas is also a colourful time for the Spanish Steps when pots of poinsettias are placed on the steps and around the Christmas crib, which is set up on one of the lower landings closer to Piazza di Spagna. This was the time of the year, 30th December, when our wedding was celebrated in the Church of Trinità dei Monti – a privilege for former students of the Sacred Heart which unfortunately is no longer allowed under the new Order.

To conclude I feel inspired by the Romantics and Daniel Varè's words about the Steps 'Stairways are like scales: series of notes at different standard intervals. And the Roman 'scalinate' have a character all of their own...". Hence, I would like to end my experience of Rome with a poem I wrote about the Steps and Piazza di Spagna:

PIAZZA DI SPAGNA

The boat flows on before a painted scene,
Emitting soft lulling music as it goes
Accompanied by 'scales' of various tones,
Whose steps fall and rise against stone walls
Under different shades of pink and blue
According to the time of day and Season's hue.

Article and poem by **Georgina Gordon-Ham**

FORTHCOMING EXHIBITS IN LONDON:

November 2009 – Onwards: With the opening of their new Medieval and Renaissance Galleries, the Victoria & Albert Museum will be displaying on a permanent basis their collection of sculptures by Donatello and Giambologna, the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, twelve glazed terracotta ceiling roundels from the study of Piero de' Medici.
Victoria & Albert Museum, Brompton Road, corner of Thurloe Place.

18 February- May 16, 2010: "Michelangelo's Dream"
Built around a fine treasure of the Courtauld's collection, Michelangelo Buonarroti's "Dream of Human Life," this single work is reckoned to be one of the finest drawings of the Renaissance. The show will also feature letters and poems by the artist.
The Courtauld Gallery, Somerset House, Strand.

22 April – 25 July 2010: "Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings"
The show will comprise a high-quality group of Italian Renaissance drawings from the British Museum's holdings together with fifty others on loan from the Uffizi Gallery, Florence.
The British Museum, Great Russell Street.

28 April – 20 June 2010: "Another Country: London Painters in Dialogue with Modern Italian Art"
This is an exhibition showcasing the reaction of ten London-based contemporary painters to the work of twentieth-century Italian artists.
Estorick Collection, 39a Canonbury Square N.1.

30 June-12 September: "Naples: Photographs by Johnnie Shand-Kydd"
Over eight years' worth of "shootings" in Naples by this noted English photographer, revealing the city in all its gritty glory.
Estorick Collection, 39a Canonbury Square N.1.

10 July-26 September 2010: "Sargent and the Sea"
Eighty paintings, watercolors and drawings by John Singer Sargent on the single theme of seascapes and coastal scenes, including a number featuring Capri.
The Royal Academy, Piccadilly.

15 September – 28 November, 2010: "Bandits, Wilderness and Magic"
Works by Salvator Rosa (1615-1673)
Dulwich Picture Gallery, Gallery Road, SE21.

13 October, 2010- 16 January 2011: "Canaletto and his Rivals"
The exhibition highlights the rich variety of Venetian scenic paintings by Canaletto, juxtaposing them with similar works by Bernardo Bellotto, Francesco Guardi and others to illustrate the different artistic approaches to the same material.
The National Gallery, Trafalgar Square, WC2

PONTE VECCHIO: THE GOLDEN BRIDGE OF FLORENCE

by Alexandra Richardson

The summer of 1944 was one that Florence would never forget. As Allied troops battled their way northwards through Italy, pushing at the German defences, Nazi forces occupying the Tuscan capital were poised to put deadly contingency plans into motion. If they could not halt the Allied advance, they would at least slow down its progress severely by making the Arno River impassable. They would blow up the bridges of Florence. A battalion of German engineers rushed in from northern Italy on Sunday 30 July and the command went out: all citizens living along the banks of the Arno were to evacuate their homes before noon. Operation Feuerzauber was now underway.

By early Monday morning, Florentines were no longer allowed to cross any of the city's bridges. German soldiers fixed TNT to the underbellies of the city's six bridges, as well as to the foot of the palazzi lining the riverbanks. On the famed Ponte Vecchio, which for centuries had endured – more than any other city bridge – as a vital city-centre passageway, the German soldiers chiselled away the square paving stones to set in place a lethal web of mines. Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, German Supreme Commander for the Southwest, came personally to check on 3 August that everything was ready. At midnight, the sickening thuds began. First to go was the Ponte alle Grazie, then the Ponte San Niccolò. For the next four hours, explosion after explosion reduced the bridges to rubble. All of them were gone. All, that is, except the Ponte Vecchio. Unknown to all but a handful of German engineers, in a confidential telegram dispatched to them, the Wehrmacht's High Command had ordered that "...no military steps regarding 'il vecchio' may be taken...whatever measures already arranged are to be herewith rescinded immediately".

The world's most loved bridge, just over 300 feet long and lined sardine-tight with a string of glittering little jewellery shops, had miraculously survived. By Christmas, only four months later, the Ponte Vecchio staggered back to life as probably the most iconic sight of Florence, one that draws some four million visitors annually today.

The Ponte Vecchio and its goldsmith occupants know a lot about bouncing back. In its long and resilient history, the bridge has weathered destructive floods. Its edges have been singed countless times by fire. Yet it has remained doggedly the quintessential emblem of the Tuscan capital. First-century BC. Roman settlers are thought to have been the first to span the Arno with a frail wooden crossing. Violent floods brought this crossing down twice, in 1177 and 1333. Both times, Florentines rebuilt and improved it. First *written* records of the bridge now known as the Ponte Vecchio date back to the 9th century AD. By then, it had moved slightly downstream, to the narrowest point of the Arno. Although five arches were reckoned to give more stability, by the early Renaissance, the Ponte Vecchio's were streamlined to three, the better to allow a freer flow of

water and to reduce the chances of debris battering against the pylons.

Trade began to flourish on and around the bridge. Tanners and purse-makers were among the early occupants. By the early 1400s, butchers had taken over. Livestock was herded onto the bridge, slaughtered and entrails tossed over the side. Nearby was the fish market. All in all, the air must have been pungent! Adding to the flavour of the place, at least one murder occurred there on an earlier occasion. On Easter Sunday 1215, a young nobleman Buondelmonte dei Buondelmonti was pulled from his horse en route to his wedding and stabbed to death by the family of another spurned fiancé of his bride-to-be. And it is suspected that the butchers might, too, have occasionally settled disputes with meat cleavers. But the peace was mostly kept by a custodian posted at the southern access to the Ponte Vecchio (and he also collected tolls from transiting pedestrians and carts). Reminded of this rambunctious past, one jeweller today commented: "It's peaceful nowadays. Police patrol cars come by – they're the only vehicles allowed to drive across our bridge. So there are no more flashing blades!"

The Ponte Vecchio became "old" sometime between 1218 and 1220, when other bridges were built across the Arno, such as the Ponte alla Carraia and the Ponte alle Grazie. Throughout the 1200s, there were modest wooden storefronts lining part of the bridge. But a dramatic "remake" came after the terrible flood of 1333. The reconstruction would be entirely in sturdy stone. It was widened to a little over 13 yards, to accommodate increased traffic. "It had two very beautiful and rich pylons and three arches which cost a lot of gold florins," one historian recorded. The span was given a lovely symmetrical look with four matching wings of arched shop arcades, broken at the centre by an open belvedere. The new construction cost the city of Florence 60,000 florins, of which the authorities were able to recoup 800 annually in rents from the 44 shopkeepers who swiftly snapped up premises.¹

Cosimo de Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany enlisted Giorgio Vasari to step in for a final architectural touch to the Ponte Vecchio in 1565. The commute from offices at the Palazzo Vecchio to home at the Pitti Palace on the other side of the Arno was an undignified, dangerous and pungent walk for the Medicis. And besides, Cosimo's son Francesco was about to be married. A private corridor seemed a more stately manner for the royal entourage to be sedan-chaired back and forth. A 1 1/2-foot passageway was built in a record six months to Vasari's design. Small windows were created, nicknamed "gli occhi" by Florentines, for the rulers to peep down on the public. (Today the corridor boasts a handsome collection of self-portraits by such artists as Rembrandt, Rubens and Raphael).

In 1593, Grand Duke Ferdinand I decided to clean up the image of the Ponte Vecchio "for the benefit of strangers to

¹ The city fathers would divest themselves of bridge ownership a century and a half later. After that, owners no longer restrained by zoning restrictions had a field day. Anarchical architecture flourished. They extended their shops out over the water to gain more space. Perilous terraces were slapped on. The late historian-mayor Piero Bargellini was to note dryly, "The bridge grew more characteristic in the picturesque sense, but less so architecturally".

town." Henceforth, only goldsmiths could occupy the bridge. And for good measure, he doubled the rents of the occupants. The bridge has been glittering in gold ever since. And indeed, it even has its own appointed patron saint, Eligius, himself a 6th century goldsmith.

Just what is the magic ingredient that endears this colourful old bridge not only to the people who work on it but also to those millions who flock to it each year? After all, store-lined spans across water are not a total novelty. They enjoyed great popularity throughout the late Middle Ages in Europe. And indeed, the Rialto in Venice and the Poulteney Bridge at Bath

happily still survive. Maybe the late novelist Giorgio Saviane who lived for a half-century overlooking the Arno's famous bridge put it best: "The Ponte Vecchio has a whole life of its own and it keeps changing. It is that constant renewal, whether it's the bird life swirling around it from above or the continually changing faces streaming across its walkway, or the changing colours of each season, or the Arno itself flowing underneath its arches that makes it all so magnetic".

Like an aged beauty full of character who has posed for artists for much of her life, it is a safe bet that she'll go on doing so for many years to come.

FORTHCOMING EXHIBITS IN ITALY

ROME

8 October 2009 – 10 January 2010: "The Power and the Grace – The Patron Saints of Europe" The exhibition offers an opportunity to see the Christian roots of Europe. More than one hundred and twenty works – coming from the most prestigious museums of Europe – by artists such as Van Eyck, Memling, Mantegna, Del Sarto, van Dyck, Tiziano, Veronese, El Greco, Guercino, Caravaggio, Murillo and Tiepolo are on display.

Palazzo Venezia.

24 September 09 – 17 January 2010: "Rome – Paintings of an Empire"

The Scuderie del Quirinale will showcase *Roman Imperial Painting*: frescoes, portraits on wood and on glass, decorations and landscapes from patrician *domus*. This is the first time an exhibition is completely devoted to the paintings of ancient Rome, *The Scuderie del Quirinale*.

2 October 09 – 24 January 2010: "Caravaggio and Francis Bacon"

The Galleria Borghese will inaugurate an extraordinary exhibition to compare Caravaggio and Francis Bacon, the two "cursed" painters. The temporal distance that divides the artists seems to effortlessly shrink along a single line of inspiration producing a silent dialogue.

Galleria Borghese.

6 October – 7 February 2010: "Michelangelo Buonarroti – Architect in Rome"

Architecture and Design – The exhibition offers a rich collection of drawings by Michelangelo from his youth to the extraordinary creations of his later years. A selection of drawings and sketches for projects on Rome by the great artist.

Musei Capitolini.

16 October – 28 February 2010: "The Grace Kelly Years – Princess of Monaco" From Hollywood star to Princess of Monaco through an album of photographs, plus some personal belongings, jewellery, and her fashion accessories.

Palazzo Ruspoli.

18 February – 13 June 2010: "Caravaggio"

This exhibition celebrates the 400th anniversary of the death of this great artist.

The Scuderie del Quirinale.

30 March – 11 July 2010: "Nature according to De Chirico"

Exhibition of the artistic output of Italy's most important metaphysical painter.

Palazzo delle Esposizioni.

FLORENCE

11 December – 24 January 2010:

"Candida Höfer in Italy, Part 1: Florence. Portraits of Spaces" Portraits of Spaces, an exhibition of twenty monumental photographs of some of Florence's most impressive interiors by the German photographer Candida Höfer.

Palazzo Medici Riccardi

26 February – 18 July 2010: "De Chirico, Max Ernst, Magritte and Balthus. A Look into the Invisible"

This exhibition explores the early years of the career of De Chirico and the influence of his first works on movements such as Surrealism and the Neue Sachlichkeit.

Palazzo Strozzi.

MILAN

15 October – 24 January 2010: "EDWARD HOPPER"

An American landscape painter who explains America and American life through his paintings.

Palazzo Reale.

15 October – 15 February 2010: "Crivelli's works arrived in Brera"

Carlo Crivelli, the Venetian born painter, who knew Mantegna re-emerges after centuries of being forgotten.

Pinacoteca di Brera.

VERONA

27 November – 7 March 2010: "Corot and modern Art – Souvenirs and Impressions"

100 Paintings are on display between Camille Corot's paintings and those by artists who were inspired by him. Monet, Renoir, Pissaro, Berthe Morisot, Van Gogh and Gauguin all acknowledged his talent.

Palazzo della Gran Guardia.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE WHITE WAR

by Mark Thompson

Faber & Faber – £25 h.b.

The author will be speaking at a BIS event on 10th March 2010 at the University Women's Club, 2 Audley Square, London W 1 (6:30pm – 8:30 pm).

Mark Thompson has written a remarkable book about the 1915-18 war on the Italian/Austrian front. One of its strongest points is that it is more than a work of military history. That history in itself is sad enough and deserves telling. In three and a half years of war some 680,000 Italian soldiers died in combat or in prison, only slightly less than the number of British deaths over a longer period. Depending on definitions, a further half million to one million were injured. Conditions were appalling. On nearly every front the Italians had to charge up steep slopes that were well defended by layers of trenches and barbed wire. The Carso was trackless, treeless, waterless and pockmarked: limestone splinters added to the carnage caused by shell-bursts. Alpine winters brought avalanches and frostbite to all the other horrors of war. Under General Cadorna Italian soldiers were sent again and again into twelve "Battles of the Isonzo" that advanced the front line in thirty months of fighting by scarcely fifteen kilometres, all and much more were lost after the disaster of Caporetto.

To the British and French, the Italian front often seemed like another, quite different war. There were the usual condescending criticisms of Italian inactivity, as if Italy had not lost enough men or the Allied offensives on the Western Front had somehow been such conspicuous successes. In global terms, the Italian front pinned down vast numbers of Imperial troops which otherwise would have reinforced the Germans in both the west and east. And if Rome crassly overplayed its hand in demanding, in the secret Treaty of London of 1915, large chunks of territory that were patently not Italian, it is equally true that Britain and France, desperate to bring Italy into the war, were happy to promise territory that didn't belong to them anyway.

Mark Thompson is very good on Italy's belated entry into the war, the divisions in the country and strong neutralist tendencies, the growth of ultra-nationalism and the disastrous consequences of D'Annunzio and his ilk's denunciation of the "mutilated peace", in other words a peace that didn't give Italy virtually the entire Dalmatian coastline. But that story has been told before. What makes "The White War" so rewarding are the many chapters on the ordinary soldier, the filthy conditions of the front line and remoteness of the high command, the harsh discipline – extending to deliberate "decimation" – exacted by

Cadorna and his commanders; and yet, in the odd moments when the front line quieted down, delight in the sheer beauty and majesty of the Alpine peaks, the smell of heather, the stars, and the sense of comradeship. Thompson interviewed the few veterans still alive, read many of the war memoirs, and concludes that, much as most soldiers wanted the war to end, they felt some pride and sense of sacrifice in what was always presented as Italy's fourth war of liberation. As around Verdun in 1916, so after Caporetto in 1917 mutinies, desertions and war-weariness nearly broke the lines: and like Petain in France, so Diaz in Italy introduced much-needed reforms of army discipline, food rationing and leave.

Thompson weaves other ingredients into his story, and so leavens the effect of what otherwise could so easily become a stultifying account of attack after attack breaking against Austrian resistance. There is an excellent chapter on the peddling by Italian newspapers' war correspondents – notably the famous Luigi Barzini – of patriotic platitudes and bombast, something which Thompson is well qualified to discuss given his account (in "Forging Wars") of the media's dubious role in the recent Balkan conflicts. There are interesting discussions of the melting pot of Trieste, the cult of élan or "vitalism", and a chapter on Ungaretti and other wartime poets.

A future edition could usefully have more maps; it's sometimes hard to work out which armies were fighting where and for what. Austria's problems are well documented. The Empire nearly always had many fewer soldiers at the front than the Italians; and in the last year of the war had to cope with the economic blockade and consequent starvation, and the desertion of Czech and other regiments from the front as the Empire slowly fell apart. In their last months the troops had little food, no boots and uniforms in shreds. It is a miracle that the Imperial troops fought on to the end, and one would like to know more about the experiences of their common soldiers; especially the Croats, Slovenes and Bosnians who made up half the army on the Italian front, only to find themselves after the war part of a newly constructed, independent Yugoslavia that had renounced Habsburg rule. Thompson's book, indeed, is largely written from an Italian viewpoint. That may be inevitable. As he points out, the losers – both governments and veterans – did not care to recall the war. But sentiment is changing. The Habsburgs are back. Anyone who visits Caporetto – now in Slovenia – will find an excellent and well-documented museum that manages to be remarkably even-handed between the contestants. It has taken ninety years and common EU membership to get there.

Tom Richardson

THE ITALIAN CHAPEL

by Philip Paris

This book tells an unusual and touching wartime story, using imaginative recreation, based on many interviews with the original protagonists and their descendants.

The story involves the building of a Catholic Chapel on the remote islands of the Orkneys and the artistic human beings among the many Italian prisoners of war taken there to help in the work of completing a barrage. Like the workers from Balfour Beatty, responsible for the constructions, they lived in Nissen Huts – those grotesque “homes” for US and British soldiers throughout much of Britain. They consisted of two arching pieces of corrugated iron meeting in the middle to form the roofs and secured by concrete bases.

Fortunately the British officer in charge generously allowed one such hut to be set aside as a Chapel and gave permission for one POW, Domenico Chiocchetti, to convert it, with a mixture of materials, into an ornate place of worship. Especially after the armistice with Italy, there was much fraternising between the British and Italian workers, as well as with the usually stern Scots on the islands. Almost immediately after the Chapel's completion the Italians were moved to warmer parts before repatriation.

However, Domenico returned in the 1960s with much press and TV coverage to help the islanders restore the only remaining evidence of the Italian “occupation”. To this day the Chapel is still maintained and has become the main focus of attention for the many tourists from all over the world who



Philip Paris and the Italian chapel (by courtesy of Philip Paris)

visit the remote islands. Though the dust cover has images of the Chapel, there are unfortunately no photos of the ornate interior or the strange curved corrugated iron exterior. However, the book brings out strongly the humour and warmth that characterised relations between the POWs and the local inhabitants, thrown into close proximity by wartime events.

Keith Killby

Founder of The Monte San Martino Trust



The Italian chapel (by courtesy of Philip Paris)

ELIZABETH DAVID AND THE WRITING OF HER ITALIAN COOKERY BOOK

One cold, overcast February afternoon fifteen years ago, visitors stepped through the doors of the Phillips auction house in central London to peruse the goods. There was a reverential silence as they shuffled by, staring at the lots soon to come under the hammer: dented moulds, chipped ramekins, rusting whisks, wooden spoons still bearing traces of past meals. There were also everyday pots and pans, humdrum storage jars, glassware, much-thumbed books and a long pine table. Had their owner been just anyone, perhaps these battered, homely kitchen wares wouldn't have even made it into Phillips.

A few days later, though, on February 22, 1994, the saleroom was already packed, some 400 strong, at 9:30 a.m. for the noontime auction, with others crowding the corridor outside. Phillips realised three times what had been anticipated that day. People had come to scoop up whatever they could from a person "who had had such an effect on their lives", as several bidders put it, to keep a little piece of her. They had all come for Elizabeth David, one of England's foremost cookery and food historians, who had died two years earlier. A person who was so pivotal in bringing Mediterranean warmth to the drab post-war doorsteps of England.

Elizabeth David was no softie. By all accounts, she could be demanding, distant, dogmatic, daunting. Yet she wrote like a dream, was a perfectionist and had that magical knack of capturing ambience and mood in the pages of her books, seamlessly blending descriptions, reminiscences and lore in with her recipes.

Some dip their toes cautiously, testingly, into new waters. Elizabeth David chose – in 1939 – the Baptism-by-Fire route to discovering the Mediterranean, by helping navigate a two-masted yawl through the canals of France down to the Riviera, thence towards the Straits of Messina. All this on the eve of World War III! This odyssey (punctuated by seizure of the boat and her belongings en route, plus an intermission in jail) eventually got her to Greece and later Cairo. It was all an eye-opener that would serve her well professionally in the coming years. At Antibes, she met author Norman Douglas who helped *mediterraneanise* this new young protégée, sharing thoughts on food, history and how life ought to be lived. He was 72, she 26. And so she began focussing on the new colours, shapes and aromas of lovingly arranged foods as she walked the vegetable and fruit markets of the Mediterranean. Some stark differences between "here" and her homeland were now beginning to sink in and she would tartly note that "we have become too accustomed to accepting third-rate travesties of good food. A slab of patently tough meat is still too often shoved into the oven with a shrug and a prayer. The vegetable course is still quite ignored". By now, David had begun carefully watching those southern cooks at work and she squirreled away recipes as she went. In 1946, her wanderings were over and she was finally back in London and harsh new realities. Many foodstuffs, of course, were severely rationed; other things were simply unavailable. And as for the Mediterranean memories of things like courgettes and aubergines... Too, there was an insular hostility towards what the English wrote off as "those queer messes which foreigners called food". Elizabeth David railed right back: "Conditions were awful, shortages did make catering a nightmare. And *still* there was no excuse, none, for such unspeakably dismal meals.

Words like apricot, olives and butter, rice and lemons, oil and almonds produced assuagement. Later I came to realise that in the England of 1947, those were dirty words that I was putting down". But she *did* continue writing things down. Eventually "A Book of Mediterranean Food" came out in 1950. She was 36 years old at the time. Given the era, it must have been quite breathtaking for her to blithely call for an abandoned use of cream, butter and eggs. And then there was that Turkish recipe for stuffing a sheep! A *whole* sheep. In 1950, when England still had another four years to go before being taken off meat rationing. Nonetheless, the book was warmly reviewed by all but the RSPCA: she treated crustaceans cruelly, they said, in her recipe for roasted lobster. In any event, magazine commissions rolled in and within twelve months, Mrs. David had produced a second book, "French Country Cooking".

Thoughts began to bubble on the back burner for a third book. This time, she would take on Italian cooking, undeterred by English friends who exclaimed to her: "All that pasta! We've got enough stodge here already, you won't find much else in Italy. You'll have to invent". Undeterred, she nevertheless approached her new subject more gingerly. If French cooking was second nature to her, Italy was still an unknown quantity. Sparked by undiminished zeal, though, she marched into her new mission, ever ready with a barb: "Nobody has ever been able to find out why the English regard a glass of wine added to a soup or stew as a reckless foreign extravagance and at the same time spend pounds on bottled sauces, gravy powders, soup cubes... artificial flavourings".

In March 1952, she set off from London by train for Italy. For about one year, she would be in the hands of the Italian State Tourist Board, which gave a crucially supportive hand in all her wanderings up and down the country, from one region to the next. Her base during that period was a two-room attic flat at the Palazzo Doria in central Rome and out she forayed, to learn all about panforte, risotto, raw artichoke salad, mostarda di Cremona, moscardini, pesto, finocchiona. And although she happily plunged into all these discoveries, it didn't take long for her to realise that she was up against a number of hurdles: the project was far larger than she had reckoned on and she needed to extend her deadline. The Italians had a far greater instinctive feel for cooking than their English counterparts: how, for example, was she to translate *una manciata* into a precise measurement? She worried, too, about how the English were going to find ingredients if they didn't live in London's Soho district. Her adored mentor, Norman Douglas, had died one month before arrival. From wartorn England, however, she earned no sympathy in her final woe, when she wrote home to her publisher about how all her food samplings had started to show on her svelte waistline. Her publisher wrote back: "I have been weeping at the thought of your liver, as I crumble up a little slice of cold luncheon meat".

By early 1953, research completed, she returned home from her Rome base. Recipes had to be tested and fine-tuned, the book committed to paper. She had, during her Italian sojourn, triumphed in coaxing illustrations out of Renato Guttuso during a chance encounter in Venice in mid-1952 -- iconic pictures that were probably the most famous ever to accompany one of her books. The book came out in November 1954 and was reviewed glowingly by a galaxy of illustrious fellow-writers: Freya Stark, Evelyn Waugh and Olivia Manning. She would go on to write six more books about food. But "Italian Food," in her own estimation, was her very best. When

she was later awarded an OBE, one fan would thunder, "Her OBE is a rather mangy honour for someone who has made a social and cultural revolution. Who else in recent times can be said to have changed the habits of so large a section of the population of an entire country? Surely she should be Damed as soon as possible". Her nine books sold over 1.2 million copies in paperback editions alone and were translated into many foreign languages. No one seems to disagree that through her writings, she "emancipated" the British palate and changed

English cooking forever. And who knows how many people today, as they push their trolleys through the aisles of their local supermarkets, past bunches of rosemary, alongside hills of aubergines, beyond garlands of garlic, rainbows of peppers, boxes of wild mushrooms, sprigs of fresh basil pause – even briefly – to pay silent homage to the lady who inspired so much of this bounty, Elizabeth David.

Alexandra Richardson



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Eyre Street – Little Italy (photo by courtesy of Archives of Camden Local Studies Centre)



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WE WISH TO REMIND MEMBERS OF THE BRITISH-ITALIAN SOCIETY'S BACKGROUND AND THE BRAVERY OF ITS FOUNDER MEMBERS

In 1941, a group of British academics, journalists, broadcasters and former residents of Italy decided to form the Friends of Free Italy, echoing the "Friends of Italy" founded in London by Mazzini in 1851. The new group resolved to remind their countrymen of the true and immortal Italy which transcended the Axis regime with which the country was at war.

Around the same time, a parallel group of Italians formed the Free Italy Committee which became the Movimento Libera Italia. Following internal dissension, the Movimento merged with the Friends and in 1945 became the British-Italian Society which it has remained ever since. Its aims and objects were redefined as being "to increase the understanding in Great Britain of Italian history, Italian institutions, the Italian way of life and the Italian contribution to civilisation, to increase the knowledge of the Italian language in Great Britain, and to encourage and promote the traditional friendship between Great Britain and Italy."

The aims of the Society are to increase the understanding in Great Britain of Italy and Italian civilisation and to encourage friendship between the two countries.

The Society is interested in the political, economic and social development of Italy as well as its culture and history – and as much in the Italy of to-day as in the glories of the past.

Regular lecture meetings are held on topics covering a wide range of subjects. The annual Leconfield Lecture, in memory of the Society's first Chairman, Lord Leconfield, is always given by a speaker of particular distinction. Various social events and occasional outings to places of interest are also arranged.



Monte Cassino (photo by courtesy of Ian Grainger)

The Church of Santissima Trinità al Monte Pincio and the Spanish Steps above Piazza di Spagna

