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# Dear readers

In this issue of *Rivista* we invite you to join us on a journey through Italy and take a leisurely stroll through the beautiful gardens created by Russell Page, the 20th century landscape gardener, marvel at the extraordinary buildings designed by the late Zaha Hadid and visit some of the best wine-producing regions in the country. No issue of

# In this issue

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by John Julius Norwich

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One of the most astonishing – and occasionally, it must be said, the most irritating – aspects of the people of Venice down the ages had been their ability to turn their hand to virtually anything, and then to do it quite superbly well. As seamen, they were already in demand by the sixth century, after which their ships dominated the Mediterranean and beyond for the better part of a thousand years. As merchants, they were regularly trading with Russia, Central Asia, India, Siam and China at a date when such regions were, to the rest of Western Europe, little more than fable and legend. As imperialists, they administered their own trading colonies in Dalmatia, Greece, the Aegean, the Levant and the Black Sea, to say nothing of a later land empire that extended westward across north Italy almost as far as Milan. As political theorists, they developed an utterly individual system of government which, though technically an oligarchy, was in fact a good deal more democratic than any other in Europe – with the arguable exception of Switzerland – and which effortlessly maintained itself, with only the barest minimum of fine tuning, from the end of the thirteenth century till the end of the eighteenth and the death of their Republic. As international statesmen, they were the inventors of modern diplomacy. As industrialists, they initiated mass production half a millennium before Henry Ford.

Where the visual arts are concerned, Venice's record is, if anything, more dazzling still. First, and most peculiarly her own, comes that which stems directly from her Byzantine past: the art of mosaic. In all Italy, her only rival is



born around 1515, spent much of his youth in Germany, where at the Bavarian court he was much influenced by the great Orlando di Lasso, better known as Lassus. When he returned to his native city, already well known for his prodigious output of motets and madrigals, he was almost immediately appointed organist at St Mark's, a position of immense authority and prestige. His ceremonial music for the Basilica set a new standard in the use of massed choirs and instruments. In 1585, the year before his death, he produced his ultimate *tour de force*: a *Gloria* in sixteen parts, sung by four separate choirs, which was performed at a special high mass in honour of a group of several visiting princes from – believe it or not – Japan.

Andrea's star pupil was his nephew Giovanni. Like his uncle, he too, spent some years in Germany, leaving Venice in 1574 at the age of about twenty – thus luckily escaping the terrible visitation of the plague which occurred in the following year. Again following the family tradition, he returned to Venice to become organist of St Mark's where, both as an instrumentalist and a composer, he soon showed himself an even greater musician than his uncle had ever been. No composer before him had managed so brilliantly to combine splendour and magnificence on the one hand with so much deep, heartfelt devotion on the other. Harmonically, too, he was far more adventurous than Andrea, and his improvisations – hugely important in his day, and how sad it is that we never hear any nowadays – seemed to his hearers to be divinely inspired.

The seventeenth century began for Venice with a major diplomatic triumph. She defied the Pope – and won. For long she had been famed for her religious toleration, welcoming Muslims and Jews – as long as they remained in their Ghetto – and, in more recent years, all the various Protestant sects spawned by the Reformation. But these enlightened policies were coming under increasingly heavy fire from Rome, and with the accession of the Borghese Pope Paul V in 1605 her relations with the Papacy reached breaking point. Finally, in May 1606, all

all but Ariadne's famous lament, *lasciatemi morire* (let me die) is lost. In 1612 Duke Vincenzo of Mantua died; and his successor, barely six weeks after his accession, dismissed Monteverdi from his court, giving him just twenty-five *scudi* as a reward for twenty-one years of faithful service. He and his two sons returned, virtually penniless, to Cremona where, a few months later, he received the call to Venice. And in Venice everything changed. He was, first of all, treated like the distinguished artist he was, no longer as the menial he had been in Mantua. He was also making far more money than he had ever made before. After three years there he received a note from the Procurators of St Mark appointing him as *maestro di cappella* of St Mark for 10 years at a salary of 400 ducats a year "with the usual perquisites".

These perquisites included a large and commodious apartment adjoining the Basilica, furnished according to his wishes, and a generous allowance of free wine. No wonder he cheered up. "Wherever I go to make music," he wrote, "whether it be chamber music or ecclesiastical, the whole city longs to be there. My duties are extremely agreeable."

In 1631 Monteverdi took holy orders and was tonsured; the following year saw him appointed deacon. But the priesthood made little or no difference to his life, and it was only after his ordination that he looked again to opera. He reverted to Greek mythology with a work inspired by the last books of the *Odyssey*, *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* (The Return of Ulysses to his Homeland). But his work was not yet done. One more opera remained to be written – and that opera was the most astonishing of all. *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (the Coronation of Poppaea) was first produced in Venice for the carnival of 1643. It is one of the first operas, if not *the* first, to desert mythology for history – for here is the story of the marriage of the Emperor Nero to the unscrupulous and power-hungry Poppaea. It is an unpleasant tale, as Nero callously gets rid of his wife Octavia to marry this most sinister adventuress. And, considering the circumstances, it is also a most unusual one: the baddies win. In the seventeenth century, this would surely have been something really shocking: how, people asked, could an ordained priest, now seventy-five years old, write such a worldly and licentious drama? And as for the astonishing love duet at the end: that superb musicologist H C Robbins Landon described it as almost obscene, and it somehow seems to be all the more so since the music itself is of such disarming simplicity and purity.

Monteverdi lived to see his last – and greatest – opera staged, but for very little longer. He died at the end of that year, 29 November 1643.

His influence continued for a while, with his star pupil, Francesco Cavalli, who was also to become *maestro di cappella* at St Mark's, though Cavalli too was to achieve fame through his secular works – above all his operas, of which he produced no fewer than forty-two – rather than his religious productions. Another composer of the time who simply must be mentioned is Barbara Strozzi, who became the most celebrated female composer of her

age – perhaps of any age, since female composers have



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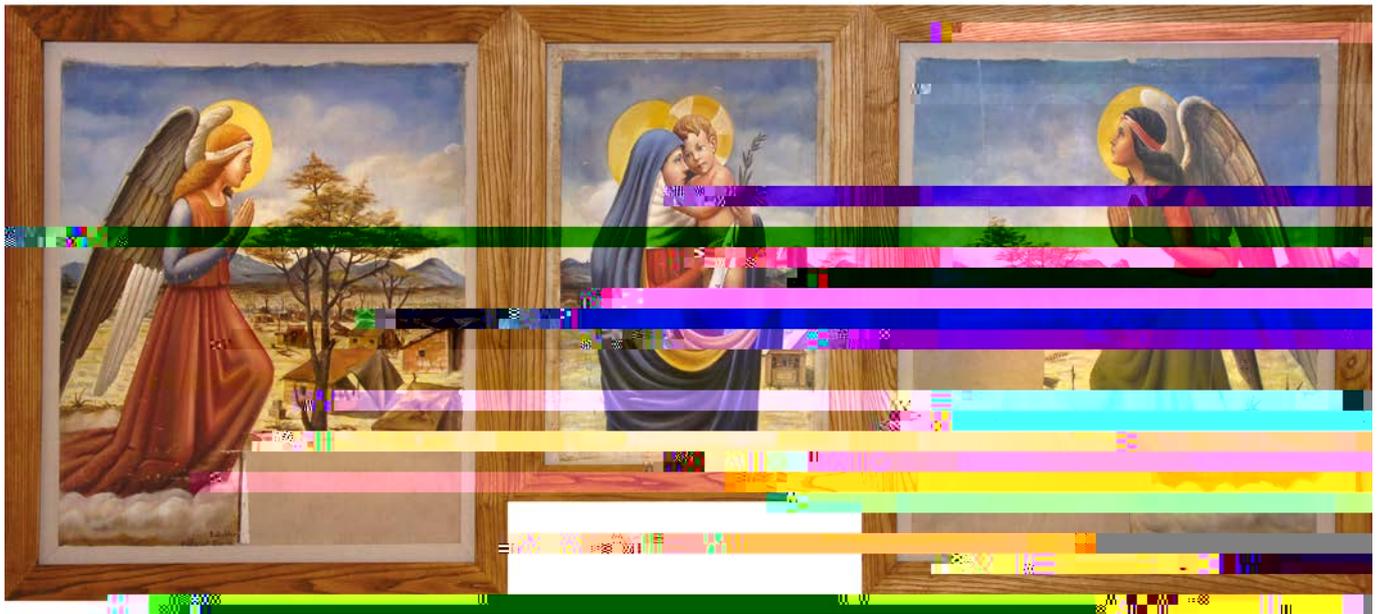


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by Mark Morpurgo

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displayed by the Officer Commanding, Capt. Hawksworth and by Company Sergeant Major P V Navid. By hard work (they) made the function of the hospital possible, notwithstanding enormous difficulties. For the part played by these two men we are most grateful.'

Indeed it says a lot for their skills that only twelve prisoners died in the time the camp was operational.

Diplomacy rather than imposed discipline was clearly Alfred's approach. Indeed it was the only possible route forward. He had a South African engineer (Major Crowhurst) to supervise water supplies, the Company Sergeant Major, a few Nigerian and Somali guards, and that was it! Alfred encouraged sport (he had previously been a keen football coach in Nigeria), and set up the production of bricks, so the prisoners could build more solid buildings 'to protect themselves from the wind which blew every night, bringing with it the sand.' He also seized the opportunity of having a camp band (nicknamed Alfred's

# Zaha Hadid's Italian Legacy

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by Jacqueline Gargus

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**D**ame Zaha Hadid, the late Anglo-Iraqi architect, is featured in a retrospective exhibition housed in one of her most important buildings and her first building in Italy, the MAXXI in Rome (MAXXI is a clever anagram for Museum of Art of the XXI Century). The exhibition, entitled *Zaha Hadid*

galleries, organized around a central, vortex-like atrium. There is no dominant path through the museum, rather visitors are encouraged to explore and forge their own experience across the soaring spaces, fluid ramps and

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# Manuzio's Marvellous Mark

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by Alexandra Richardson

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Henry James, that unrepentant wordophiliac, marshalled nineteen of them to propel his way through one 165-word sentence in his novel *The Golden Bowl*. In a fit of one-upmanship, Marcel Proust did him better with 110, as he negotiated a path through a 958-word thicket of prose in *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. (Perhaps it was less serpentine in French). One fan on the pro side of the fence famously quipped that this prime condiment of written language fell 'with the precision of knives in a circus act, outlining the victim'.

No blades, of course, have ever *really* been flung over that unassuming squiggle, the common comma, as far as history records. But heated vocal skirmishes, some of them legendary, are still recalled, unfaded by time. One of the most celebrated tussles goes back to the late 1920s, during the early editorship of Harold Ross at the *New Yorker* magazine, when he sparred with his staff writer James Thurber over this member of the punctuation family. Thurber dismissed the comma as a 'weedy growth...spreading... like dandelions'. Ross, on the other hand, consumed by a clarification complex, believed, in the interest of lucidity, that sentences should be squirming with them, like worms in a fisherman's bait box. On one occasion, Ross daggered his writer's description of Old Glory so that the American flag's colours read 'red, white, and blue' rather than 'red white and blue', as the writer fervently wished. Thurber thundered. Ross railed and, as salary paymaster, the latter won out.

Punctuation has always fuelled strong opinions. Many grammars devote meaty chapters to it, addressing present-day dos and don'ts. Often they set out the issues then slip out the back door, leaving it to the writer to choose his course. The National Comma Counters Society nursemaids its charges more assiduously, albeit in a tongue-in-cheek manner. Yet others have taken to attributing human traits to certain punctuation marks; for example one teacher of writing and journalism likened the dash to Kim Kardashian, 'misplaced, over-exposed, shamelessly self-promoting, always eager to elbow out her jealous sisters the comma, colon, and semi-colon'. Another wag, a far-flung New York Times columnist, took a handful of American politicians head-on: Jimmy Carter, he wrote, most resembled the question

mark; Gerald Ford was the spitting image of a period and Daniel Moynihan was a shoo-in for the exclamation point. (No one seems to acher7nsu5



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Manuzio had a worthy colleague in his shop. He was the Bologna-born Francesco Griffo who elsewhere had already begun to make a name for himself as an accomplished font designer and punch-cutter, engraving printing types. Encouraged by Manuzio to come up with some marks to lend greater clarity to texts, Griffo devised the comma in its curved form, a tail dangling below. For good measure,

he invented the semi-colon as well. He also designed the cursive *italic* style. It was Manuzio, nonetheless, to be credited for popularising these innovations in the Aldine Press publications.

Like Mr Ross, some writers over time felt that 'more was more', as opposed to 'less is more'. Like seeking second and third helpings of dinner. Exuberant comma consumption came to be labelled the 'Oxford comma', or 'serial comma'. Regretfully, Aldo Manuzio no longer is around to weigh in on this debate. But his legacy is still very much with us.

On the 500th anniversary of his death two years ago, no fewer than six important exhibitions were mounted in the UK to mark his achievements while many others were held throughout Europe and the USA. The shelves of the British Library count over 185 books in their collection on the subject of this Venice-based printer. Whatever would we have done without him when writing the phrase 'Let's Eat Grandma'?

*Alexandra Richardson is a former co-editor of Rivista and is currently working on a novel set in Antwerp. She gratefully wishes to thank the comma, used here 78 times.*



the heir to 'Capability' Brown, but the formality of others of his gardens evokes Le Nôtre, the genius who created Versailles for Louis XIV. He himself acknowledged as his



a series of garden rooms on a steep hillside, clearly influenced by Hidcote but anchored in the local landscape by a lemon garden and the use of tufa for the paths linking the different parts. Il Giandorto, south-west of Magione, terraced along the contours of another hill,

# Navigating a path through Italian wine

by David Way

Twelve years ago I went on my very first wine tour to Italy. I had a choice between a classic trip to Tuscany and a rather more adventurous one that went south to Puglia, Basilicata and Campania. I had no idea then that these were radically different choices. Neither of the options had a concrete meaning for me. I was in the position of many wine lovers in the UK, knowing something about wine in general and about classic French regions but nothing about Italian wine. As it happened I ended up on the southern Italian trip and enjoyed every minute of it.

Since then I have visited Italian wine regions about 40 times, created a wine website, taught introductions to Italian wine, run tastings and become a Master of Wine student. I now write study materials with a special focus on Italy. It has been a rapid, thrilling and extraordinary journey, and one that continues.

But because my journey from wine lover to professional has been so rapid, I can still remember the sense of bewilderment at the complexities of Italian wine. If anyone promises to make Italian wine simple, do not believe them – just try the simple test in the panel below.

With 20 regions all with their own wine culture, varieties and specialisms, Italy has more unique local grape varieties than any other country in the world. And within regions there are massive differences. Trentino and Alto Adige may make up one region for administrative purposes but are two regions culturally and vinously. The same is true of Emilia-Romagna. And just as importantly, the *campanilismo* of Italian life in general means that everyone believes with total conviction that the wine of their village is the best. I vividly remember visiting a high quality winery which had been recommended by a reputable guide. At the end of the visit, the producers gave me the opened bottles that we were tasting as he had no further visitors in the next few days. I took them to the *agriturismo* where I was staying and shared them with my hosts. They tasted them courteously and impatiently. As soon as we had finished, they said, 'Now you must taste our wine!' ... which of course for them was the best and the



Vineyard in Chianti Rufina  
Photo David Way

only point of reference. This sort of attitude is both a huge strength and a weakness. In my experience, only the most farsighted Italian producers think about how their wines appear to the outside world. And while Italians know about the wines of their own regions, many may know only the basics about the wines of other parts of the country.

How then should we navigate this extraordinarily rich and varied vinous offering?

Wine is not just a glassful of sensations or even a conveyor of mood-changing alcohol. It belongs to particular cultures, it has a history; at its best it has a profound sense of place. This means that the language of the country or region which produces the wine is part of the experience. I probably do not need to persuade Anglophone readers of *Rivista* that learning or maintaining your Italian is a worthwhile activity. But it has real benefits for wine enjoyment too: Italian wine tastes better in Italian. Interestingly quite a few of Italy's absolute classics have simple names which any English speaker can manage: Prosecco, Chianti, Soave, Brunello and Barolo. But as soon as you get beyond these you can be struggling. Perhaps the best example is the name of the DOCG (*Denominazione di origine controllata e garantita* – the label guaranteeing the quality and origin of a wine) for Prosecco. This is for the fizz that comes from the hills of the Prosecco area, not the inexpensive volume wine from the plain. They really should have named it simply Prosecco Superiore. But instead they called it Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG. That is 19 syllables; and the names of the two principal towns of the zone which they smuggled into the name (no doubt with great pride!) are a nightmare to pronounce correctly – unless you speak good Italian.

Wine styles have changed dramatically in the last 30-40 years. In general, we no longer need to drink poorly-made wine as standards of both viticulture and winemaking have risen dramatically. Wine has also become fruitier and

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more accessible. The latter is largely due to the success of Australian, New Zealand, South African and American wines with their bold fruity whites and soft, approachable reds. This is a long way from Italian styles, however much they are fruitier and more accessible than they were a generation ago.

If you were brought up drinking Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc with its powerful, even aggressive, grassy-and-passion-fruit flavours you will need to work a bit to understand the muted palate of Soave, Verdicchio or Fiano, classic neutral Italian whites. The first two should have lovely, palate-cleansing acidity. The last will have a certain rounded voluptuousness – as it should for a wine from the south. But none of them are going to be obviously fruity. Let them speak to you quietly, drink them with food and they will come into their own.

A bigger shock awaits those who try some of the great Italian reds: learning to love high acidity and noticeable tannins.

*Impegnativo* – challenging – is the best word for Brunello, Barolo, Taurasi and many more. The classic Italian red style is high in acidity and even higher in tannin, the grippiness which gives long lasting structure to the wine. This style makes classic Italian reds great with big meat dishes but it is initially forbidding and can come as a surprise for those whose usual tippie is a softly structured Australian Shiraz or an obviously ripe Chilean Merlot. Having taken small groups of English people on wine trips in Italy, one visitor memorably summarised tasting his first Brunello as 'great but undrinkable'! But this is just a matter of taste: some of these same people have become as familiar with the wines of the Langhe or of Tuscany as they were with Bordeaux or Burgundy – because they are now used to the style.

One of the joys of wine is the endless inventiveness of the winemaker in agrarian cultures and the distinctive styles

# Obsession at the Barbican

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by Michael Ratcliffe

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Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (1942) is a landmark movie sending a dark message from a dark place and time.

One of the first neo-realist films that helped to define the image of Italy abroad after the Second World War, it was made largely by anti-Fascists, many of them underground communists, and set in the haunting, melancholy wetlands of the Po Valley near Ferrara. This poor, thinly populated landscape of long roads, huge skies and steep flood-dykes was also the setting of the young Antonioni's first film, the documentary *Gente di Po* (1943), and of Rossellini's revolutionary *Paisà* (1946). The poverty was extreme. To all three it must have felt like the antithesis of Mussolini's blowsy Rome, whose imperial ambitions had never reached it at all.

This land offers no refuge for Gino, the drifter who jumps off the back of the train and finds the saggy, the books



Clement VII), wanted two images for the cathedral of Narbonne, of which he had been appointed archbishop. First, he gave Raphael that of *The Transfiguration*, then Sebastiano that of *The Raising of Lazarus*. He knew that Raphael would feel compelled, in such a competitive situation, to paint with his own hand rather than give it to his assistants, at a time when he had more commissions than he could physically handle.

Furthermore, Giulio knew that Sebastiano would turn to Michelangelo for help; thus both commissions were likely to be executed to the highest standard. Events took an unexpected turn at the conclusion of this

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- A Pietà painted for the cleric Giovanni Botonti for his chapel at San Francesco, Viterbo (1516), for which a sheet of drawings (1512) was made for the figure of the Virgin;
- A chapel in San Pietro in Montorio, Rome for the Florentine banker Pierfrancesco Borgherini, (1524), for which drawings of *The Flagellation* and of *Christ at the Column* (1516) survive; and
- *The Raising of Lazarus* (1519) for Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, for which two sinopia drawings for the figure of Lazarus (1516) have come down to us. Did Michelangelo also send drawings for the dominant figure of Christ? None have so far come to light.

Some scholars have viewed the commission for the Lazarus through the lens of a paranoid Michelangelo, constantly obsessed not with what Sebastiano was up to (his artistic status in these years was not one that would have warranted any loss of sleep), but with Raphael and his ascendancy. The great rival for Michelangelo was Raphael, then the most feted artist in Rome. Under both Julius II and his successor Leo X, Raphael had been granted the decoration of the papal apartments, the design of a series of tapestries for the Sistine Chapel and had been appointed successor to Bramante as papal architect from 1514. According to Vasari, Michelangelo's aim, in supplementing Sebastiano's talents as a superb colourist with figurative and compositional drawings, was to undermine Raphael's dominance in Rome.

The Lazarus commission was thus strategic for both Michelangelo and Sebastiano; but it was for the patron too. Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, (subsequently Pope

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# Hemingway in Italy

Richard Owen (The Armchair Traveller at the bookHaus, 2017)

by Ian Grainger

This is not a book with pictures. The only photograph is that on the cover, showing Hemingway in a gondola: middle-aged, heavy-set and looking slightly like a cad. One suspects the book would sell much better if adorned by the famous photo of Hemingway as a young man, wounded in an Italian hospital bed during the Great War, but happy, confident and radiantly handsome. Nevertheless, the gondola shot captures something of the curious ambiguity of this strange man: behind all the swashbuckling masculinity of the bull-fighting big-game hunter, there is a hint of the unexpected timidity to which so many attested. The book is not a biography as such. One gets what it says on the tin – an account of the writer's time in and connections with Italy. So, for the years 1927 to 1948, when Hemingway was not in Italy at all, there is nothing. But the years before and after (particularly those before) are covered in detail and the early Italian years were seminal for this impressionable youth from the American mid-west.

The book is beautifully written in a mixture of travelogue and memoir but eschews literary criticism. It provides a sweeping overview of the early events which made Hemingway's name (through *A Farewell to Arms*) and a close examination of his complicated emotional life and four marriages.

A constant theme is an air of uncertainty about what actually happened and what Hemingway wanted people to imagine had happened. Perhaps the greatest example of this is the episode at Fossalta di Pave in 1918 when he was wounded by the explosion of an Austrian mortar shell lobbed at him. 'The 227 wounds I got from the trench mortar didn't hurt a bit at the time' he wrote to America with characteristic bravura. Yet he was only a volunteer delivering cigarettes and chocolate to Italian troops and there lurks a suspicion that this adventurous youth may simply have gone nearer the front line than was wise for him (or indeed for the others killed and hurt in the explosion). The event was pivotal for Hemingway and he repeatedly returned to the spot where it happened. Further, the 'baptism' which he maintained he received from an Italian priest in the hospital afterwards (extreme unction perhaps?) laid his claim in later life to be a Roman Catholic, so as to be able to marry his second wife.

The 'make-believe' runs through other aspects of his Italian journeys, including the drink. Hard drinker he certainly was



– the grand hotels gave him Valpolicella for breakfast and left flasks of it outside his room while he was writing. But Owen cites one academic analysis of the list of drinks said to be consumed in a single night by the lovers in *Across the River and into the Trees*. The understated conclusion of the academic concerned is that the list 'takes us a little beyond the bounds of literary realism'.

The book is much to be recommended as an easy account of Hemingway's many links with Italy. Lots of interesting locations appear, from aristocratic duck-shooting in the Veneto to the Italian Riviera to Taormina and the Castello Nelson in Sicily; and from Ezra Pound to the Duce (whom Hemingway met and did not rate). A very good read.

*Ian Grainger is a former Vice Chairman of the British-Italian Society*

# Chairman's Review

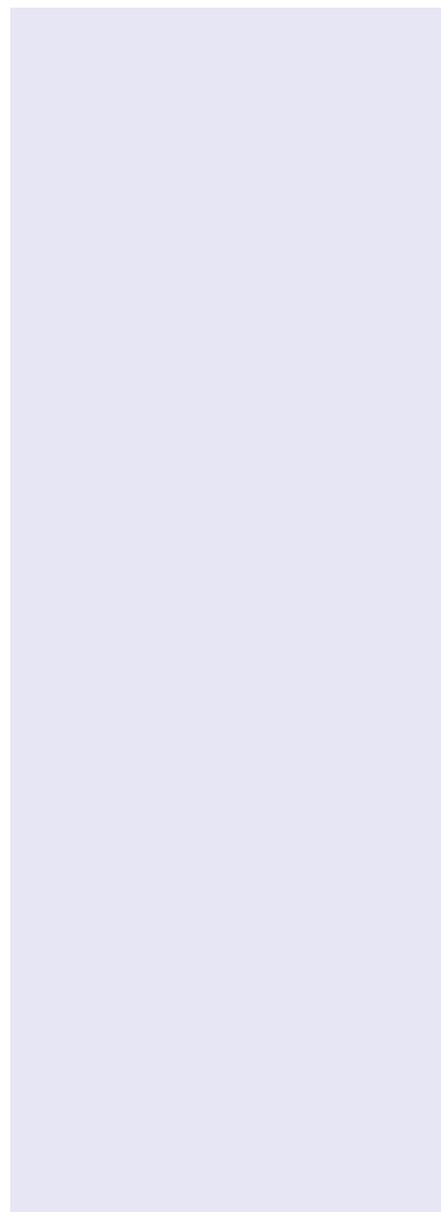
## September 2016 – July 2017

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by Richard Northern

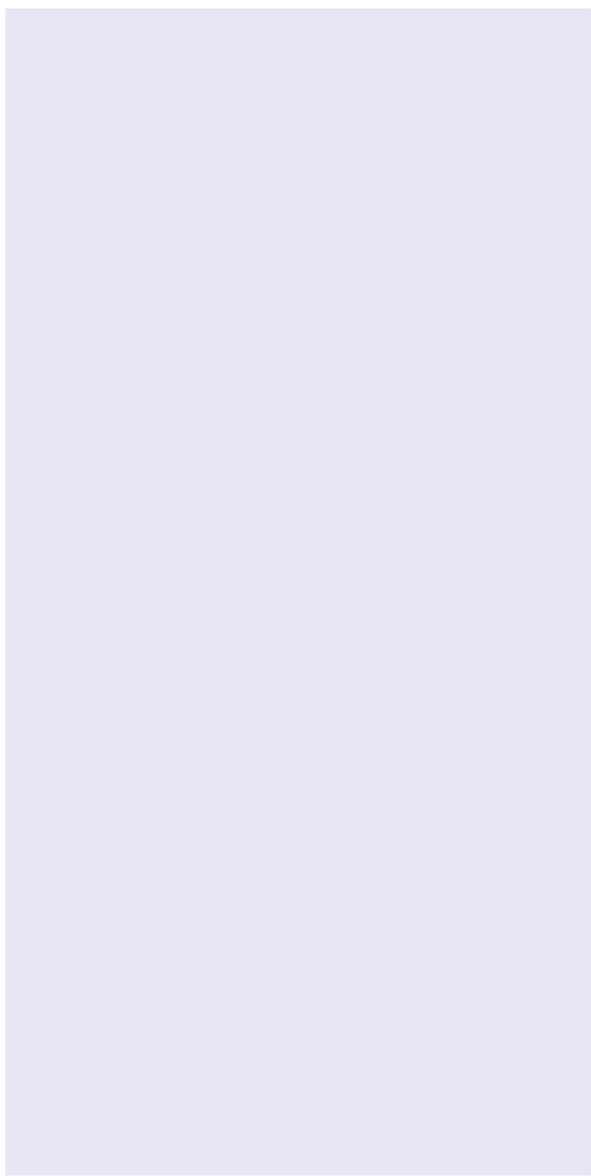
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Our celebrations to mark the 75th Anniversary of the Society in 2016 concluded with a memorable Gala Dinner at the Inner Temple Hall in London in December. 150 guests enjoyed a reception with music, followed by dinner and an entertaining after-dinner speech by the





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**D**r Charles Avery, who presented this talk to the Society at its meeting in October 2016, has given sterling service to the Society over many years, both as a trustee until 2015 and as a speaker on art-historical topics linked to his flow of expert publications, most recently about the sculptor Francesco Bertos. This talk on the de Levis bronze-foundry dynasty was memorable, wittily delivered and illustrated by photos from Charles's just-published and sumptuous *Catalogue Raisonné*.

Charles has clearly had a lifelong interest in Joseph de Levis (1552-1611/14 – the date of his death is uncertain) since his early days as Deputy Keeper of Sculpture at the V&A in the 70s. He has sustained that interest while working for Christies, and subsequently as an independent writer, scholar and lecturer. He alluded in his talk to the research which he had done as a younger man in the Verona area, even climbing up dangerous-sounding bell-towers to inspect and then photograph a number of de Levis-produced church bells, which are often still in use. One bell dating from 1576 he had tracked down to a convent in Trento, though others have ended up in the Museo Castelvecchio in Verona itself. Charles also showed us images of smaller hand or table bells, with elaborate friezes of baroque ornamentation and often coats of arms. These bells were probably used to control meetings or to summon servants, and one is shown

in Raphael's famous portrait of the Medici Pope Leo X, on a table in front of the pontiff.

De Levis and his elder son and nephews – for this was a family business stretching over several generations – also produced elaborately-decorated firedogs (of which a pair of fine examples have been in the V&A since its early days as the Museum of Ornamental Art in Marlborough House), as well as candlesticks, inkstands decorated with graceful female figures, and a splendid bronze ewer, which was sold by the French Rothschilds to an American collector for \$276,000 in 2001. Charles's book focuses in detail on 45 of these beautiful objects, though his talk necessarily concentrated on 20 of them, so we could get an idea of the complex

# The 2016 Leconfield lecture: The beginnings of Global Opera

In the 2016 Leconfield lecture, Dr Benjamin Walton of the University of Cambridge, gave us a glimpse of how opera was spread around the world in the early nineteenth century and, more specifically, by one particular touring opera troupe. Dr Walton took us on an entertaining and whirlwind tour alongside this small troupe of players, who took opera and especially that of Rossini, firstly to Latin America and then on to parts of the Far East, more particularly, Macau and Singapore.

Dr Walton commenced by demonstrating the global spread of opera by pointing to the new opera houses opened in recent years in places such as Muscat in Oman, Guangzhou in China and Astana in Kazakhstan and also to the worldwide trend of opera screenings in local cinemas. He pointed out that in 1916 opera was already global, with opera houses constructed from the Met in New York to Hanoi in what was then French Indo-China, and from

# Sorrentino and Contemporary Italian Cinema

In February 2017 Adrian Wootton, Chief Executive of Film London and the British Film Commission, gave an exhilarating and informative talk about the renowned Italian film director and screenwriter, Paolo Sorrentino. Adrian knows Sorrentino well and is a great fan. He has regularly curated and presented his work in the UK and believes he is the greatest living Italian screenwriter and director. Adrian described how in the 1970s and 1980s there had been a dip in Italian cinema and few Italian films were shown at international film festivals. This was partly due to logistical problems (films were not available in advance) and partly because their themes were often light-hearted and aimed at the domestic market. Notable exceptions were the films made by Fellini, the Taviani Brothers and later Nanni Moretti. There was a sense of the doldrums at this time until Film Italia was set up to promote Italian contemporary cinema worldwide.

Paolo Sorrentino was born in Naples in 1970. His film career started in 1994 with his first feature-length film *One Man Up* (*L'Uomo in più*, 2001) for which he was awarded the Nastro d'Argento prize. He worked with Toni Servillo in this film, the beginning of a partnership which was set to endure. The film, though successful, did not, in Adrian's opinion, prepare us for what was to come.

His second film *The Consequences of Love* (*Le Conseguenze dell'amore*, 2004), a psychological thriller again starring Toni Servillo, was shown at film festivals and gained international recognition. It explored the mindset of a lonely businessman being used as a pawn by the Mafia. He falls in love with a waitress and relates to her his story of financial ruin, drug use and exploitation by the Mafia. Some of the film's themes, such as humour, secrets, shock, contrast, emotional aridity, the transformative power of love are developed in later films. Adrian commented that a sense of surprise marks Sorrentino out as a screenwriter and director – a sense of authenticity mixed with fantasy.

His next film *The Family Friend* (*L'amico di famiglia*, 2006), tells the story of a malicious septuagenarian loan-shark who develops a fixation with the beauty of one of his customers. This film was described pejoratively as Fellini-esque but Adrian believes Sorrentino is exceptional and is an artist with a bigger vision than the others.

One of Sorrentino's best-known films, *Il Divo*, released in 2008, was a dramatised biopic of Giulio Andreotti, the controversial Italian politician. A film about corruption and deception in politics, it was compared to Matteo Garrone's *Gomorrah* at the time. Toni Servillo plays the part of Giulio Andreotti brilliantly. Adrian believes that this film begins to fulfil Sorrentino's promise. It is a film opera which welds



talent for water-colours and drawing while at the Slade before the war. He was a contemporary of artists like Paul Nash, Duncan Grant and CRW Nevinson. After initial hesitation, he volunteered in 1916 for flying training with the fledgling Royal Flying Corps and served initially in France. He proved to be an adept pilot. But in February 1918 he was posted to Italy, to a squadron equipped with Sopwith Camel fighters, based near Vicenza. He was an operational pilot for five months, shooting down three Austrian planes and crashing twice after being hit by surprisingly effective Austro-Hungarian anti-aircraft fire.

Late in July 1918, he was appointed an official war artist to record the work of what were now RAF squadrons in Italy. For this he actually sketched from his pilot's cockpit while flying the Camel with his knees, though this process became less hair-raising when he started to fly as observer in a larger two-man Bristol fighter. He painted Italian civilians and refugees, as well as vivid scenes of aerial strafing of roads filled with Austrian troops, searchlights over cities, and impressions of the dramatic mountain landscapes. Jonathan explained the deep effect this experience had on Carline, shown by his post-war annual returns to Italy from 1920 until his death in 1929. His biggest works were oils (two shown in the exhibition) depicting aerial combat in the fantastic setting of the Brenta Valley or high above the Piave. These vivid oils show his romantic obsession with flying in the cold, bright air of Italy – an early form of *aeropittura* – but his smaller works are eye-catching too, and even seem to have a touch of the Japanese print about them (he would have seen these in the British Museum pre-1914). No wonder Carline, who was a star of the big post-war show held at the Royal Academy of war artists' work and in 1922 was appointed head of the Ruskin School of Art in Oxford,

Italian landscape, but he also produced sympathetic scenes of Italian women working for the British army, washing uniforms, unloading supplies (especially of beer and rum), and road-mending. He depicted too ragged Austro-Hungarian soldiers happily surrendering to the British, rather than to the resented Italians. They both continued their photography after the war; Brunell took motoring subjects and Brooks was photographer for the Prince of Wales until he was sacked mysteriously in 1925.

The show's successful balance between paintings, sketches and photos was mentioned by Jonathan Black, who modestly forbore to add that it had been his research and his selection skills which had disinterred these artists' works from the vast reserve collection at the Imperial War Museum. Carline's reputation can surely only benefit from this exposure, and I would put him up with Nash, Nevinson and Bomberg (who also painted aerial scenes) among the best war artists of WWI. The colourful intensity of his style is not offset by bitterness or sarcasm, as in Nash's case.

The displays were set off by three new installations by Keith Roberts, one a model of a Camel, the second a mocked-up field post-office (vital for troop morale), and the third a set of clapperless bells – perhaps, as Jonathan suggested, referencing the damaged *campanili* of Friuli and Venezia Giulia. We concluded our evening in the light, bright spaces of the 'new' Estorick with wine and prosciutto, asking Jonathan our questions and savouring a close-up view of the works on display. This had been a very good way for the Society to mark the Italian/British alliance in WW1, and to strengthen our valued link with the Collection.

**Charles de Chassiron**



Sydney Carline, *The Destruction of an Austrian Machine in the Gorge of the Valley of the Brenta 1918* Courtesy Imperial War Museum

## Fishing in the Mediterranean: Past and Future

The marine biologist, Daniela lo Monaco, began her absorbing and entertaining talk given in Italian, by telling us about the history of fishing in the Mediterranean. We were shown images of frescoes, graffiti, mosaics and artefacts found in and around Sicily which provided a wealth of information about the fishing methods used in ancient times and demonstrated how little has changed in the subsequent millennia.

Daniela referred us to a number of ancient texts including Ovid's *Halieutica* (*Halieutica* means 'about fishing') and his vivid description of pike, lamprey and mullet being caught in nets and on hooks and to another *Halieutica* by the Greco-Roman poet Oppiano. Aristotle and Pliny the Elder also wrote about fish in their works on natural

history – another pointer to the importance of marine life throughout the history of the Mediterranean. Until the beginning of the 20th century the sea was considered to contain an inexhaustible supply of marine life but this view was to change after the Second World War.

We were given an ancient recipe for Garum, a fermented fish sauce used extensively in the cuisine of ancient Egypt,



Daniela Lo Monaco  
Photo Linda Northern

Greece and Rome. The herbs and spices that were added to enrich the sauce varied from one area to the next and could include coriander, fennel and celery seeds, aniseed, saffron, pepper and oregano. The mixture would be left to ferment for at least seven days and could then be kept for a long time. Although often thought of as the ketchup of its day, it was probably more like soy sauce.

Fishing in the waters around Sicily is not for amateurs as Daniela discovered when accompanying a group of fishermen on one of their trips. The small boats have no GPS and the coordinates are handed down from father to son without being recorded on maps. The fishermen treat the sea with enormous respect and consider it part of their heritage though the greatest threat comes from man. Daniela emphasised the danger presented by overfishing, poaching and the use of poison by those without licences and the resulting imbalance to the marine environment. Sword fish, tuna and Mediterranean cod are particularly at risk and Daniela considered it was time for all of us to think of alternatives. Certain waters are protected where no fishing is permitted; however, these measures cannot prevent the risk of pollution to the marine environment arising from industrial activity, tourism and the disposal of waste. Fish farming, for example breeding tuna in circulating cages, can also damage the ecosystem and in

Daniela's view consideration should be given to returning to the methods of the past.

She described in some detail the use of nets, how they were designed to catch particular types of fish and the incredible skill of the fishermen in the way they swing them into the sea. She also spoke of those fish that managed to get through the nets, eat the fish and then swim away and likened them to today's diners who go to a restaurant, have their meal and leave. Other methods used by the fisherman included placing young men on high towers erected in the sea to enable them to spot swordfish, and the positioning of palm fronds on the surface of the water to provide shade so that the highly prized lampuga would swim underneath. Some catches could fetch high prices in particular the *gambero rosso di Mazara* which sells for as much as 500 euro a kilo. The talk finished with a film about Sicily and its coastal waters reminding us of the beauty of the island and the importance of fishing throughout the centuries.



Tuna merchant Madralisca Museum, Cefalu, Sicily

**Vanessa Hall-Smith**

## A Venetian Evening with the Querini Stampalia Foundation

In the elegant period (and formerly royal) surroundings of the Princess Marie-Louise Room of the Oxford & Cambridge Club, the BIS combined forces appropriately with Venice in Peril to hear Barbara Rossi and Elisabetta Dal Carlo, two of the senior staff of the Querini Stampalia Foundation, give us an excellent overview of the historic building. They described the façade dating from 1513, and the various recent modern extensions and redesigning of the interior, as well as its intriguing contents, deriving from a distinguished nobleman's collection and library, as in the case of our own beloved Wallace Collection.

The speakers related how Count Giovanni Querini left all his property in the Sestiere of San Zaccaria to the City of Venice. The property comprised his patrician palazzo and its mostly eighteenth-century contents of fine furniture and entertaining pictures. In his will of 1868 he ordained, in an unusually public-spirited way, like a good Victorian in England, that the library with its 375,000 books be opened to ordinary Venetians keen on bettering their education at times when public libraries were closed. He also provided a warm, carpeted room for the use of scholars. It has now become the official public library for the city-centre and, respecting Count Querini's special provisions, its 150 seats with PC and Wi-fi sockets are open from 10 am until midnight during the week and until 7pm on Sundays. The reading-room has 30,000 books on the open shelves and some 300

international newspapers and periodicals. Its treasures include a print of Jacopo de Barbari's famous bird's-eye view of Venice of 1500 and *The Tailors' Book* of 1550.

The palazzo's walls rise straight up from a small canal, occasioning grave problems of rising damp. Some readers will have been familiar with the boldly-modern restructuring in 1963 of the ground floor (distinguished by the then obligatory raw-looking shuttered concrete) by the distinguished architect Carlo Scarpa. Scarpa ingeniously introduced shallow channels to accommodate overflow water from the canal outside during periods of *acqua alta*, routing it securely through the ground floor of the building and making aesthetic use of its myriad reflections in mirrors. Another feature of Scarpa's design, though now perhaps rather dated, is a secret garden fashioned in concrete, emphasising the abstract use of space.

The Fondazione has recently undertaken the immense task of refurbishing the palazzo and, as the speakers explained, 'opening its space up to light and air', as well as adapting it appropriately for modern community use.



Elisabetta Dal Carlo and Barbara Rossi  
Photo Linda Northern

The contemporary Swiss architect, Mario Bozza, who had benefitted from study in the Querini in his earlier years, donated his efforts *gratis*. After a thirty-year programme, its showpieces are: a new entrance portal dedicated in 2013; an inviting 'Kids' space' embellished with swirling patterns in red, yellow and orange on its floor; and upstairs a light, bright auditorium, unusually laid out with a bank of seating sloping gently down from either side.

A wedding in 1790 had occasioned a facelift of the interior in the refined neoclassical taste. Smaller, better-lit and more intimate rooms in the French style were introduced, emphasising harmony and comfort. Querini entertained great Venetian artists here, including the famous Pietro Longhi, painter of tongue-in-cheek scenes of upper and middle-class daily life – sharing the fun with his audience – of which this is a signal collection, and the playwright Carlo Goldoni. Gaily-fashioned and decorated ceramics by Vezzi and Cozzi in the Rococo taste brighten the rooms, accompanied on the walls by some 400 pictures from the Italian, Venetian and Flemish schools, all illuminated by amazing chandeliers from Murano, notably in the *Portego*.

In the Dining Room there is a superb and elegant Louis XVI dining service in white and gilded soft-paste porcelain ordered in the 1790s by Alvise Querini, last Ambassador of *La Serenissima* to Paris: 244 items could accommodate the needs of 28 guests round the table! This is set off by several highly-populated *surtouts de table* in white biscuit porcelain by Louis-Simon Boizot, chief-modeller of Sèvres. But the

star of the sculpture collection is Canova's original clay *bozzetto* for the life-size marble statue (now in Chatsworth House) of *Madame Mère* (mother of Napoleon) enthroned as a Roman empress.

Scenes characteristic of Venetian life and history abound. For example, a series by Gabriele Bella of 1779-92, depicting in great detail a wedding at the Salute church and another showing the annual celebrations on 2 February at Santa Maria Formosa of the historical event at Caorle, when the citizens recovered their women who had been carried off by pirates. But the undoubted masterpiece in painting is a *Presentation of Christ in the Temple* of 1455 – thought to be by Mantegna until 1915 – but then attributed to Giovanni Bellini. In 2018, it is to be compared side by side with another good version from Berlin's Gemäldegalerie in Venice, London and Berlin.

Jonathan Keates, Chairman of Venice in Peril, thanked the speakers and concluded the session by emphasising the need for continued commitment by all of us at a moment when times and finance are hard for the arts. He recalled the survival of the palace after the revolution in 1849, when the mob broke in and smashed to pieces some wonderful furniture that had belonged to Marie Antoinette, and 'defenestrated' the Bellini painting, which splashed into the dank little canal below - happily to be rescued later by some more enlightened citizens!

**Charles Avery**

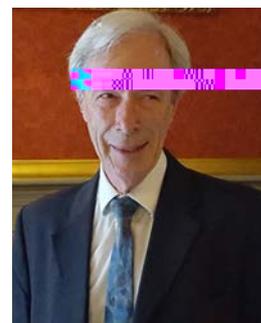
## The Villa Wolkonsky: What's in a Name?

Following the 2017 AGM, on a sweltering evening in June, Sir John Shepherd gave us a fascinating lecture on the Villa Wolkonsky, the Residence of British Ambassadors to Italy for the last 70 years. John had been brought up partly in Rome, and had later lived in the Villa himself, as British Ambassador to Italy from 2000 to 2003. Based on his research in the Italian and German archives over the past three years, he was able to recount in some detail the history of this remarkable house and garden, which overlook San Giovanni in Laterano, and its successive owners and residents. He was also able to demolish some colourful myths along the way.

After describing the 1st Century Roman aqueduct, which runs through, and still dominates, the eleven acre site, John began his story with the purchase of what was then a rural vineyard by the Russian Princess Zenaide Wolkonsky in 1829. The highly-educated, French-speaking Princess had been a lady-in-waiting to the mother of Tsar Alexander and a close companion of the Tsar himself. She had married an aide-de-camp to the Tsar and accompanied the Court around Europe after the fall of Napoleon. Attracted by Catholicism, to which she later converted, the Princess settled in Rome, near St Peter's, in the 1820s and commissioned an architect to build a summer house

(*casino*) in the former vineyard. We know that prominent artists and literary figures, including Gogol, visited the house and gardens. Indeed a number of evocative prints and drawings of the property survive. The *casino* was built beside the aqueduct, where the German Chancery later stood. The Princess' son, Alexander, expanded the *casino*, when he inherited it, so that it boasted eighteen rooms on four floors. Alexander in turn passed the property on to his adopted daughter, Nadeide. It was Nadeide and her Italo-Russian husband, who in 1892 constructed the first *villino*, which was to become the main house and current Villa. But the Russian Revolution in 1917 deprived the Wolkonsky family of its estates and income in Russia. As a result, Nadeide was forced to sell Villa Wolkonsky soon after.

After three generations of Wolkonsky owners, the estate passed into German ownership in 1922. The German Foreign Ministry, whose Embassy building and Residence had been confiscated in the First World War, acquired



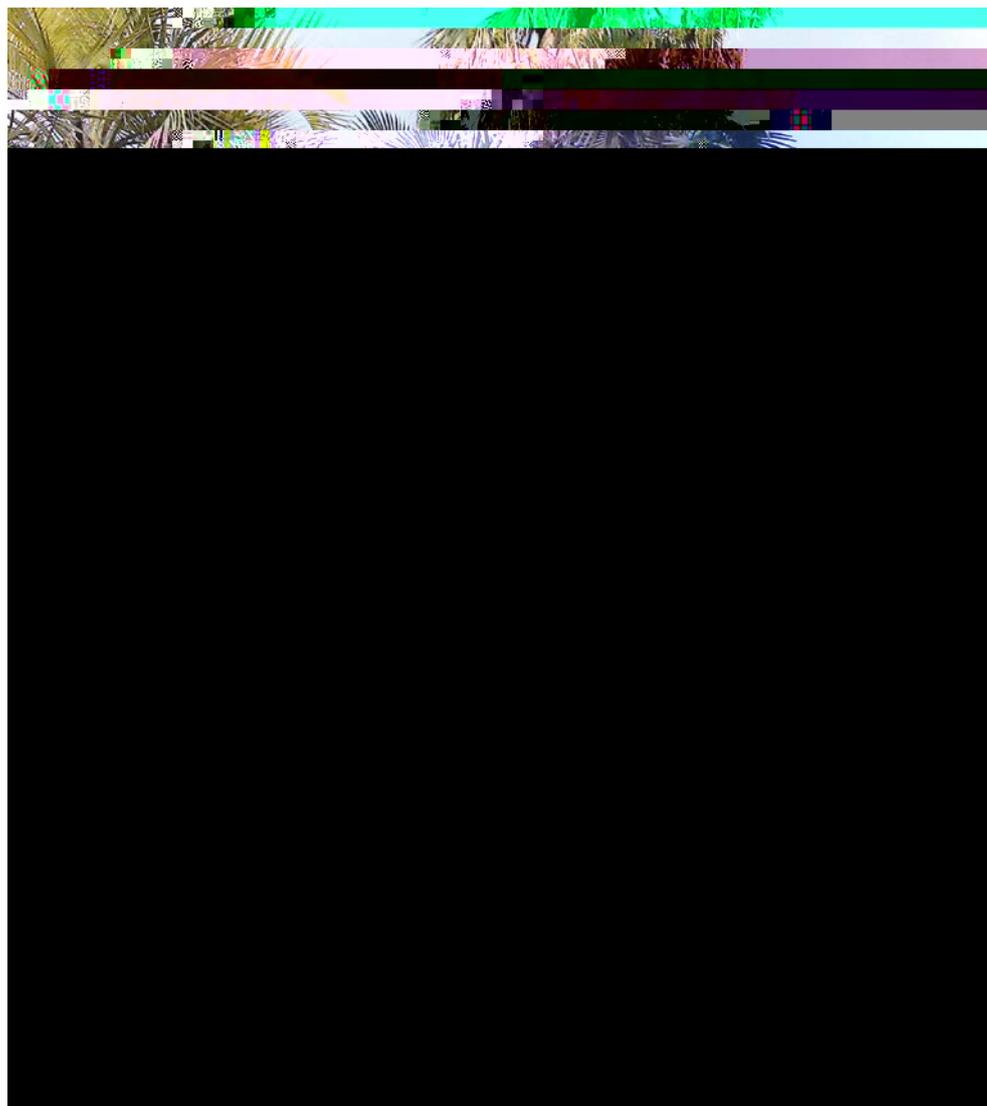
**John Shepherd**  
Photo Linda Northern

it as a replacement. The contents of the buildings had been sold; but the numerous antiquities on the site remained, and are still on display today. John described the ambitious plans of successive German Ambassadors (five in all) to expand and improve the Residence building (the *villino*), and even to build a grand Embassy on part of the grounds and neighbouring land. Only one of these plans came to fruition, a major extension, which doubled the size of the Residence, in 1939-40. The expenditure involved was so large that it had to be approved personally by Hitler. John was able to confirm that it was the non-swimmer Hitler who issued an order (possibly at the prompting of Ribbentrop, who hoped to serve in Rome after the war) insisting that a swimming pool be constructed in the grounds!

After the German occupation of Italy in September 1943, most of the Embassy staff were withdrawn, and the German Military Governor moved into Villa Wolkonsky, using it as his HQ for a few months. This unfortunate association led the post-war Italian Government to confiscate the property again. Many myths have grown up about the alleged use of Villa Wolkonsky as a Gestapo interrogation centre and a place of torture or killing. John found no evidence to support these claims; but, for many post-War Romans, the Villa remained a symbol of a nasty occupation.

The final part of the talk dealt with the installation of the British (1947-51). Damage caused to the British Embassy and Residence at Porta Pia by a bomb planted by Zionist terrorists had left the British Ambassador homeless in 1946. Within a month the Ambassador moved himself and his Embassy temporarily into the vacant Villa Wolkonsky. An attempt by the German Government to have the property restored to them in 1951 immediately prompted the British Government to purchase the site (with a speed of bureaucratic decision-making rarely seen since).

This rich narrative left John little time to cover the history of the site since 1951. He said that he would have liked to



Villa Wolkonsky

talk about: the professional conservation of the aqueduct by the UK Ministry of Works in the 1950s; the repeated dithering in London over whether to sell the estate and move the Residence to Porta Pia or elsewhere; the opening of the new Embassy building designed by Basil Spence at Porta Pia in 1972; the later conversion of the old German Chancery/workshops at Villa Wolkonsky into good-quality accommodation for Embassy staff; and the recent restructuring of the garden and conservation and display of the site's antiquities in a converted greenhouse. Perhaps material for another talk?

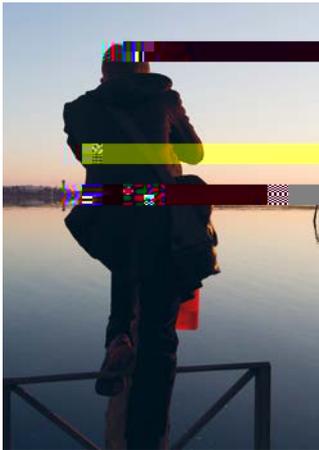
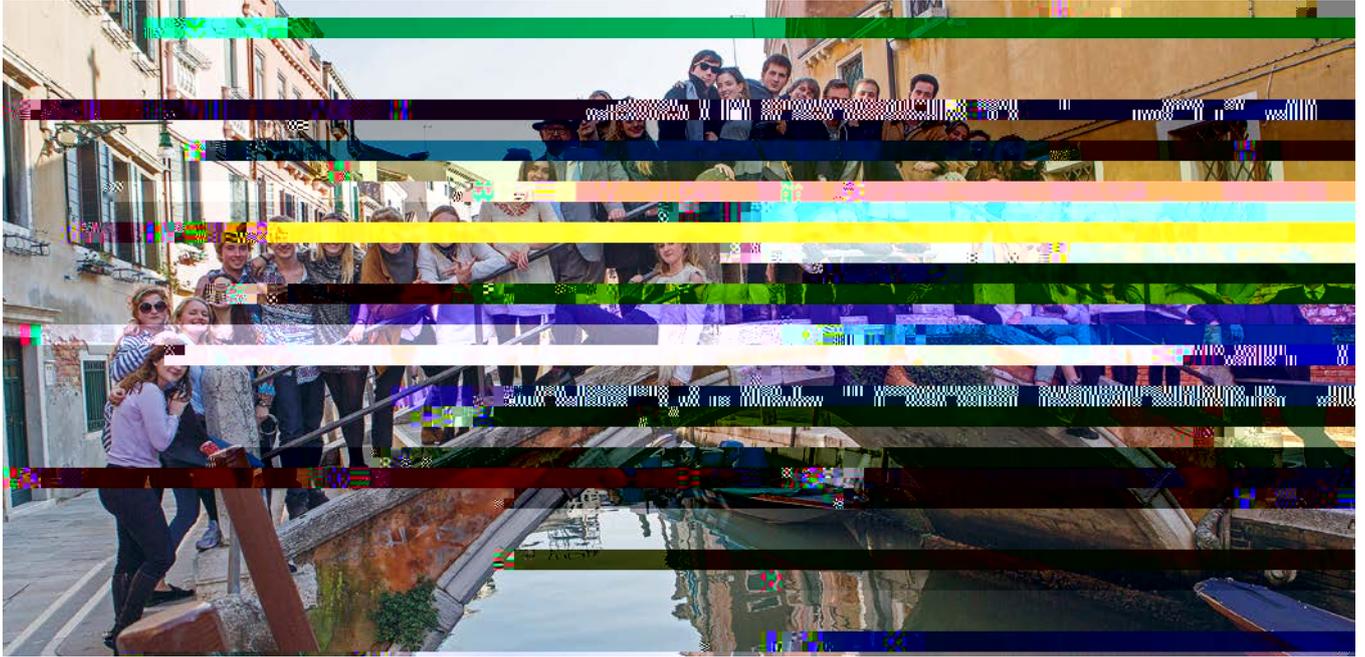
This was a carefully-researched and well-illustrated talk, giving a vivid picture of the development and conservation of a historic estate in the heart of Rome. The narrative was set against a background of the turbulent events of 19th and 20th Century European history, and peopled by larger than life characters. It is no wonder that this combination of house, gardens, parkland and colourful history have been so cherished by all the Villa's various owners and occupants.

**Richard Northern**



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