

THE VENICE IN PERIL FUND

NEWSLETTER WINTER 2015/16



Opening up the Arsenale: The Comune, its plans and the Armstrong Mitchell Crane

DEAR FRIEND AND SUPPORTER

If you had asked Venetians in the glory-days of the Most Serene Republic to name the most remarkable thing in their city, many of them would have singled out the Arsenale. This walled enclave was Venice's beating heart, making the great galleys for bringing home the merchandise which underpinned her prosperity, ships that saw off the challenge of rival maritime powers such as Genoa and Pisa and battled with the Turks for control of the Mediterranean. The word 'arsenale' derives from the Arabic 'dar es-sinaa', literally 'house of industry', and the place itself fairly teemed with hardworking technicians of all kinds, from the *segadori* and *remeri*, who sawed the timbers and fashioned the oars, to the *marangoni* building the hulls, the *chiodaroli* making the nails and the *velere* and *fusere*, women workers who stitched the sails and twisted huge lengths of cable. No wonder the Republic delighted in giving foreign guests like future King Henri III of France a demonstration of state-of-the-art shipbuilding in which an entire galley could be assembled and launched in the course of a single day.

In its modern role as northern Adriatic base for the Italian navy the Arsenale has largely remained off-limits to ordinary visitors. Except

during the Biennale, when a restricted area is given over to exhibitions, most of us have had to be content with admiring the Renaissance Porta Magna, the allegorical statues of Abundance, Vigilance and Justice or the assembly of antique stone lions, including one from Piraeus inscribed with Viking runic graffiti.

Now, however, this astounding and unique space is being gradually opened up adding a fresh dimension to the life of Venice. The Comune, through its Arsenale office, has a strategy of citizen engagement, organising Open Days and working with local associations. There are more regular opening hours and new and proposed access points served by the vaporetto stops Celestia and Bacini-Arsenale Nord linked by a steel walkway outside the Arsenale walls. A visit reveals public gardens, Renaissance boat sheds attributed to Sansovino, an eighteenth-century armoury, metalworkers' furnaces shaped like a doge's ceremonial cap and weird brick beehives designed for WW2 air raid shelters. At the Punto Mose you can find out about the Mose tidal barrier project, while the Navy also organises tours (see box). Although the Museo Navale, outside the Arsenale is closed for restoration, the boat exhibits in the Padiglione delle Navi are still accessible from the south side of the Arsenale on the Fondamenta Madonna.

Amid all this exciting activity in the Arsenale, Venice in Peril's fundraising initiative on behalf of its dominant eye catcher, the Armstrong Mitchell Crane, looks more urgent than ever. Our thanks to those who have contributed to this so far and thanks equally to all our donors in 2015 for generously furthering our other projects in Venice. Each gift made to Venice in Peril Fund represents an act of faith in the city's continuing survival, symbolized so vividly for us all by the Arsenale's re-awakening.

JONATHAN KEATES
Chairman

Further information: The Arsenale

For visiting hours, open days and special guided tours, including those to the Naval part of the Arsenale, www.arsenale.comune.venezia.it, which has a wealth of information and photographs.

For information about how buildings in the Arsenale have been adapted for new uses see Clemens Kusch and Anabel Gelhaar's *Architectural Guide Venice, Buildings and Projects after 1950*, Berlin 2014.

Photo © Comune di Venezia, Ufficio Arsenale

Cattedra Cicognara: Project completed

Some interesting discoveries have been made in the course of the restoration of the Cattedra Cicognara (see cover and below) over the last few months while it has been in the Milan studio of restorer Luca Quartana. The furniture is now back at the Accademia Galleries where it has been installed in the Tablino, the Palladio interior – the last in the sequence of new rooms opening to the public this January (described overleaf).

The slender legs of the table incorporate an innovative internal strengthening system made of thin strips of wood laid together, which also allows flexibility to support the heavy 200kg marble top. Although he knew of the technique Quartana had not come across it before.

Once the upholstery had been removed a pencil inscription running 'fu fatto adi 17 giugno 1820' revealed the date of the chair. The pedestal on which the chair was set is not original and cleaning has shown that the lions were originally painted a greenish black colour in imitation of bronze. Some of the palmettes and other decorative elements on the chair have had to be substantially remade in a lead alloy before being gilded.

The fragile remains of the original upholstery material have been retained and covered with new silk to incorporate the frontal band of original embroidery by Morassutti Conservation in Padua. Now all that remains is to find appropriate fringing or possibly to have it made up. This was not foreseen in the original project and will be an extra expense.

While the full-scale plaster versions of Canova's statues of *Paris* and *The Boxer* dominate the room, the bust of Leopoldo Cicognara, and the desk and chair he commissioned, together with the roundel made by Giuseppe Borsato as the Accademia's memorial to Canova make the Tablino convincingly evocative of the post-Napoleonic Venetian Academy.

JOHN JULIUS NORWICH, FORMER
CHAIRMAN OF VENICE IN PERIL FUND,
WILL GIVE THE 2016 KIRKER LECTURE –
SEE BACK COVER FOR DETAILS



Decorative element from the back of the chair



Cattedra Cicognara Table with porphyry inserts

Celebrating Canova and his contemporaries: At the Accademia, the Correr and across the Veneto

Friends of Venice in Peril will recall that earlier this year the Fund joined with Venice International Foundation to finance the final fit out and hang of seven new rooms in the Palladio wing of the Accademia galleries which are due to open in early January 2016. Our €100,000 appeal is in its closing stages – but it is still open for contributions.

The sequence of spaces will tell the story of the dynamic early 19th century history of the Accademia delle Belle Arti in Venice and exhibits will include casts and original models from Canova's studio in Rome, a number of which have not been accessible before, together with work by other artists, such as Francesco Hayez and Giovanni de Min. Their work was championed by Academicians who wanted to present the history of Venice and its contribution to the arts, for a wider European as well as a local audience at a particularly significant period when the influential and energetic Leopoldo Cicognara, the biographer of Canova and correspondent of George IV, was its president.

At the same time, across the Grand Canal in the Museo Correr, a further major Canova project is also unveiled this winter. Designed by the Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia and financed by the Venice International Foundation and

Friends of Venice Italy, the project has involved the restoration, cleaning and reordering of the Correr's holdings of Canova's sculptures, plaster models, bozzetti, his clay 'sketches', paintings and drawings, in five rooms, two of which have neo-classical interiors, whose restoration has been funded by the Comité Français pour la Sauvegarde de Venise.

Apart from illustrating the role of Venetian patronage for Canova, the gallery will also contain a remarkable cabinet, the *Mobile Canova*, conceived as a commemorative shrine with mementoes of the artist, dedicated by Venetians who saw him as the last great artist of the Republic but also as the first great artist of a still to be unified Italy and, more widely, of Europe itself.

2015 marks two hundred years since the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, but also since Canova's heroic diplomatic efforts – supported by the British – to bring back to Italy 249 of the 506 works of art seized by Napoleon. A convoy of carts loaded with some of the Vatican's most famous paintings and sculptures as well as the bronze horses from San Marco returned in late autumn 1815.

To mark this anniversary a programme of exhibitions and events running until April 2016 is taking place in the Veneto at Crespano del Grappa, Asolo and Possagno. Its collective title *Venere nelle Terre di Antonio Canova*, refers to the sculptor's different versions of Venus, the first of which took the Medici Venus as its starting point.

Visitors to the wonderful Canova museum at Possagno will be reminded of how British collectors appreciated his work because the Venus bought by Thomas Hope in 1821 and now owned by Leeds City Art Gallery, has been loaned to this exhibition.



Canova Corridor, Palladio Wing, Accademia Galleries,
©Venice International Foundation

2015 City & Guilds of London Art School conservation graduates Liza Nathan and Kirsty Walsh report from Venice

During our internship at San Giorgio Maggiore we produced an extensive condition survey of two altars on the south transept and carried out a deep clean of the area, working from scaffolding. This was a continuation the work



Close-up of monks' choir stall showing infestation © Liza Nathan

begun by previous recipients of the Venice in Peril Fund bursary.

At the east end of the basilica we followed up the pest-monitoring project in the monks' choir to determine the species and extent of the wood-boring insect infestation, which has been attacking the ornate carved choir stalls. Further traps have been set for future monitoring.

We have also visited other conservation projects, including the Veronese wall paintings at San Sebastiano, and, having seen the recent restoration of a series of Carpaccio paintings at the Accademia Galleries, it has been interesting to compare the different painting conservation techniques used in Italy and the UK.

Finally we joined a group of 2nd year students from City & Guilds, and their tutor Jennifer Dinsmore, to consider the varying success of past conservation treatments of exterior stonework and how approaches differ today.

Bronze doors

On 11 November, the Ambassador HE Christopher Prentice attended the service of re-dedication of St George's monumental WWI Memorial Bronze Doors. This followed completion of the project to restore them by bronze conservator Corina Mattiello, who has also worked extensively in San Marco. Reverend Father Howard Levett took the service which was also attended by the Mayor of Calvene and a small delegation from the remote region above Calvene where 100 British soldiers are buried. The doors, a scheduled First World War memorial, were made in 1926 from melted-down British cannon (see Summer 2014 Newsletter).



Bronze Memorial doors, St George's Anglican Church (detail)
© Etta Lisa Basaldella

Project proposal: To restore the miniatures in the 'Antiphonary from Advent to Easter Saturday', now in the Archivio Patriarcale di Venezia

This exceptionally beautiful illuminated Venetian choir-book dating from the first half of the 15th century is an exquisite example of the skill of the master illuminator, Cristoforo Cortese (active between the late 14th century and 1445), a renowned colourist and decorator.

Clustered around a lectern, groups of singers – normally friars or priests – depended on large, precious music books of this type to remind them of the words and melodies of the chant. An antiphonary is a book of responses and other chants to be sung during the various services of the liturgical day, such as Vespers and Compline, especially before and during the psalms. The texts are arranged as responses in a musical dialogue, either between a priest and a choir, or between two groups of singers. Following the convention of the time, the words of the chant are written in black, with the instructions about the liturgical calendar and ritual in red.

The music is a classic example of Gregorian chant, in which the singers intone the words in unison, occasionally with a few voices following at a fixed harmonic interval above or below the melody. The rhythm follows the words to make the text as intelligible as possible, though a reverberant church acoustic could give the chant a mystical resonance. For words of special emphasis, a syllable may be elongated and ornamented by a 'melisma', or sequence of rising and falling notes, to add drama to the chant. Several examples of elaborate melismas are found in this antiphonary.

The Antiphonary, rediscovered in 1930, belonged to the church of San Salvador in the Merceria, one of Venice's most historic and important churches, strategically located at the



Decorated initial showing Moses before the Pharaoh
© Gaia Petrella

city's 'navel' between San Marco and the Rialto. Between 1980 and 2000 the volume could be seen in the Museo Diocesano, located at the former abbey of S. Apollonia, just behind San Marco, but it has suffered badly from unsuitable environmental conditions and now urgently needs restoration to preserve the beguiling illuminations.

Nineteen elaborately decorated initials, as well as marginal ornament and occasional graceful figures embellish the manuscript. The strikingly imaginative decoration consists of vegetal motifs and flowers entwined with strange figures and beasts, such as the young boy blowing a trumpet astride a beast that appears to have a human face on its backside. The liberal use of valuable pigments such as gold leaf and ultramarine blue enhances the effect of richness. Sadly, however, some of the pigments are now worn, and more seriously, the gold leaf is lifting off the page because of the deterioration of the adhesive 'bole'. The illustrations vividly convey the profusion of bright colours and skilfully executed decoration that make this an exceptionally fine example of an early fifteenth-century antiphonary.

DEBORAH HOWARD

The Frari revisited: The experience of sacred art in Renaissance Venice 2015 ASHLEY CLARKE MEMORIAL

LECTURE BY DONAL COOPER

The Franciscan basilica of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, known simply to Venetians as the 'Ca' Grande' or 'Great House', is the best preserved Gothic church interior in Venice and offers unique opportunities for analysing artworks within their intended settings. In this talk, Donal Cooper, Lecturer in Italian Renaissance Art at the University of Cambridge, explored how Renaissance Venetians would have experienced masterpieces by Giovanni Bellini and Titian as facets of an integrated interior that also encompassed dazzling metalwork, precious relics, intricate wooden intarsia and refined sculptural reliefs.

The lecture's centrepiece was a reliquary that is still housed in the Frari's sacristy, created for the ampulla of Christ's blood mixed with the Magdalen's oil that had been procured by the Venetian admiral Melchior Trevisan in Istanbul in 1479 (on the same diplomatic mission that brought Gentile Bellini to Sultan Mehmed II's court) and gifted to the Frari the following year. Although little known today compared to the Frari's other treasures, the relic – and the tabernacles commissioned to guard and display it – quickly became the focus of the basilica's ritual and processional life. The ampulla's donor Melchior Trevisan was himself buried in the Frari in the Trevisan family chapel of Saint Michael, adjacent to the pier that bears the inscription commemorating his donation of the Holy Blood to the basilica.

Having introduced the processional tabernacle commissioned for the Holy Blood and its creator, a Dalmatian goldsmith with a complicated back-story of murder and exile, Donal turned to consider how the relic's processional routes through the church and its adjacent campo stimulated a series of artistic and sculptural

commissions in the Frari over the next five decades. The format of Giovanni Bellini's *Pesaro triptych* painted for the sacristy altar can be seen to respond to the tabernacle's design. Benedetto Pesaro's monumental cenotaph over the sacristy's entrance framed the relic's permanent display in a marble tabernacle aligned with the door facing the transept. Melchior Trevisan's own tomb effigy looked down to survey the relic's passage across the south transept.

Reconstructing the experience of a processional viewer within the Frari is particularly revealing for Titian's two great altarpieces for the church. The mighty *Assunta* over the high altar (completed 1518) appears to recede within the outer frame of the choir precinct as one approaches it up the central nave, a telescoping effect that the visitor can still observe today. The relationship of Titian's *Ca' Pesaro Madonna* (completed 1526 and shortly to benefit from conservation funded by Save Venice) with the church's processional topography is more complex as it was both masked and revealed by the nave piers.

A closer look at the Frari reveals how static artworks were intended to respond to the dynamic processions and rituals that brought the church to life during the Renaissance. The evolving interior design of the Frari interacted with the moving or processing viewer, as artists and patrons exploited glimpsed vistas and transient plays on depth and space. Some of these visual effects can still be experienced by visitors today if one knows where to look.

Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Devotional Spaces, Images of Piety edited by Carlo Corsato and Deborah Howard, Centro Studi Antoniani, Padua, 2015 is available from the office for £30 plus p&p

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN
HELPING TO SAVE THIS BEAUTIFUL
MANUSCRIPT PLEASE CONTACT US. ITS
CONSERVATION IS COSTED AT £6,600

Trevisan Monument © Donal Cooper

Spring Events 2016

8 FEBRUARY

Lecture: **Michael Douglas-Scott**, Associate Lecturer in History of Art at Birkbeck College
'Venice 1500: Renaissance Painters and the Printing Press'

14 MARCH

Lecture: **Dora Thornton**, Curator of the Waddesdon Bequest & Renaissance Europe at the British Museum
'Wine, Women and the Glory of Venice: Masterpieces of Renaissance Glass'

Both lectures at the Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House, Piccadilly, W1J 0BE.
Doors open 6.30, lecture begins at 6.45pm £15 for members £18 for non-members.

SAVE THE DATE

13 APRIL

11th Annual Kirker Lecture: **John Julius Norwich**, historian, former Chairman of The Venice in Peril Fund
'The Mediterranean' at the Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR.
Doors open 6pm, lecture begins 7pm. Tickets sold in aid of Venice in Peril Fund £20.

Venice in Peril Fund is now registered with Transnational Giving Europe.

This means that Friends and donors based in Italy and other countries in Europe can now make tax deductible donations to Venice in Peril Fund in the UK through a national TGE partner.

For more details WWW.TRANSNATIONALGIVING.EU

On 4 November 2016 it will be 50 years since the extreme Acqua Alta reached a height of 1.94m above sea level in St Mark's Square.

Venice in Peril Fund was founded in the aftermath of this devastating flood by Sir Ashley Clarke (British Ambassador to Italy 1953–62) following the immediate rescue mission of the Italian Art and Archives Rescue Fund. 50 years on much has been achieved, but the conservation challenges facing Venice remain as urgent as ever.

We would like to hear from you if you have any personal memories of the Acqua Alta of 1966. The anniversary will be marked with an exhibition of photographs at the Madonna dell'Orto – the first major restoration project.

If you would like to know more about our projects or how you can donate please contact us at

THE VENICE IN PERIL FUND

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