ST PETER'S ITALIAN CHURCH IN LONDON

by Luca Stanca
(English translation by Michael Coffey)

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Preface

St Peter's Italian church has immediately recognisable roots. As documented in Luca Stanca's text, the church was born to tend to the needs of poor immigrants. This character is still reflected in the features of the congregation that gathers every Sunday in the church, arriving from the most disparate areas of London.

Although it is no longer the dramatic and pervasive poverty of the mid-eighteenth century, the popular identity of St Peter's still strikes those who take part in any of its religious services. One can sense an ancient and deep-rooted devotion, with a "style" that goes back to Sundays spent in small villages some decades ago. As if those men and women, taken away from their motherland, stubbornly wanted to jealously guard its sounds, its rituals, its scents (there is an ordinary use of incense, nowadays almost unknown in Italian churches or in any case meant only for the most important celebrations), and pass them on to their children and grand children.

It is some sort of return to the past, and one can feel how this attachment to old traditions belongs to a Christianity at once simple and radical. This is partly the result of the generous pastoral activity of the Pallottine fathers who are at the centre of this community. It also stems from the fact that the community is a minority, not only in terms of "race", culture, and traditions, but also of religion. This makes the community more acutely aware of the meaning of its faith.

True, one can also perceive some nostalgia, and at the same time the pride of identity, in the faces of those who attend the ceremonies and participate to the many activities promoted in such a lively and supportive community. Solidarity is in fact the most distinguishing feature of St Peter's church: a safe and reassuring haven for all those who arrive at the parish doors. In particular, for the many young Italians who often find themselves entangled in the tentacles of London's streetlife.

St Peter's priests share their worries, heal their scars, and often manage to reconstruct difficult relationships with their families. It is those priests who are at once fathers, mothers, and grandparents to these young people. But also to all the other immigrants (temporary and permanent, rich and poor, young and old) who have had the luck of encountering them, of enjoying their friendship, and of experiencing their unequalled hospitality.

Francesco Soddu

Introduction

This book tells the story of London's St Peter's Italian church. It is the enthralling story of a project strongly opposed but stubbornly realised, of an identity in continuous evolution, of a constant reference point for the Italian community in Great Britain. It is a story that goes from the middle of the eighteenth century to the new millennium, leading us to reflections on wider themes, such as the position of the Roman Catholic Church in England, the identity of the Italian community in London, and the role of a church in today's society.

The book is in three parts. The first part goes back to the events leading to the creation of the church, reconstructing in detail the conception of the project, the collection of funds, and finally the completion in 1863. The second part examines the principal moments of the life of the church, illustrating the numerous activities that it has promoted in the past and continues to do at present. The third part takes us for a visit of St Peter's, a trip back in time that discloses the original aspect of the church through a series of original photographs from the late 19th century.

I owe a special thanks to Fr Carmelo Di Giovanni, who first had the idea of this book and constantly supported me with his enthusiasm and vitality. I am also thankful to Michael Coffey for the excellent English translation of the Italian text (with the exception of this introduction and the preface), and for the patience with which he has met my many remarks. Francesco Soddu has honoured me with his contribution, writing the preface and providing me with precious suggestions. Fr Francesco Amoroso, Emanuela Benvenuto, Lorenzo Stanca, and Ashley Stark have also helped me to improve the content and the form of the text. Finally, I wish to thank Giorgia, Maria, and Chiara: for their patience in accepting the time the book has taken from them, and for all the happiness they give my every day.

This book is dedicated to Fr Roberto Russo, a wonderful priest and a great friend, who sadly passed away on 2nd April 2001. He is greatly missed by all of us.

1. The Story of the Church

St Peter's Italian Church in London was completed in 1863, and given all the circumstances, it was an extraordinary achievement. In a climate that was still hostile to the Catholic faith, the largest Catholic church in Great Britain was built just a few hundred yards from St Paul's Anglican Cathedral itself; even more boldly, the founders dedicated this church to St Peter.

To fully understand the significance of this event, we have to delve a little further into the past and retrace the journey of three men in particular, the men who conceived the idea of an Italian church in London, and then made it a reality: St Vincenzo Pallotti, Father Raffaele Melia and Father Giuseppe Faà di Bruno.

The Idea

Imagine London, in the second half of the 18th century: a metropolis expanding relentlessly, a city at the heart of the wealthiest and most powerful nation on earth. But this was also a city in which anti-Catholic legislation was harsh, and where open practice of the faith was outlawed (1). The religious centre of the Catholic Church at the time was the Chapel of the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Sardinia in Lincoln's Inn Fields (located in the present day Sardinia Street). The Sardinian Chapel, the oldest bastion of post-reformation Catholicism in London, was only tolerated by virtue of the extra-territorial status accorded to Embassies, which enabled the representatives of the Kingdom of Sardinia to practice their faith freely. Catholic religious services were considered an Embassy function - otherwise they would have been forbidden – and English Catholics took advantage of this. (2)

A leading figure in the Catholic community at the time was Monsignor Challoner, the Apostolic Vicar of London from 1758 to 1781. At first, Catholic services were held at the Sardinian Chapel, but this quickly became too small for the growing numbers of the faithful, and Monsignor Challoner had to look elsewhere for a place big enough for celebrating Mass. At first he said Mass every Sunday morning in a flat off Clare Market (at the site where the LSE building of the same name now stands) and later in a pub rented between the cowsheds of Whetston Park (now Lincoln's Inn Fields).

The gatherings were necessarily clandestine; a burly Irishman at the door would ask "customers" for a password, and the Monsignor said Mass himself in ordinary clothes, a foaming mug of porter at hand to keep up the pretence in case the meeting was discovered. Some time after this, Monsignor Challoner started preaching again at the Sardinian Chapel, but was soon asked to stop by the Embassy, and masses for the community started being held secretly once again, this time in private houses near Great Turnstile in Holborn.

It is worth pointing out that there were few actual Italians in the congregation that assembled in the Sardinian Chapel in those days. Challoner's faithful, besides the Ambassador's retinue, consisted of craftsmen, musicians and a handful of servants recruited in Italy by members of the English aristocracy while on their *Grand Tour*. The great wave of Italian immigration really started after the end of the Napoleonic wars, when the Sardinian Chapel became the headquarters of the Italian Catholic community, just as persecution of Catholics itself was beginning to slacken off.

The number of Italians in London really took off in the first ten years of the 19th century, and Monsignor William Poynter, Apostolic Vicar from 1803 to 1827, realised that such a rapidly growing community needed a priest from its own country. In 1824 he arranged for don Angelo Maria Baldacconi to come from Siena, to be priest to the Royal Sardinian Chapel and to look after the Italian community. It is important to note that the two roles were quite distinct, in that the Sardinian Chapel, as well as being the religious heart of the Italian community, was the London parish for English Catholics.

Father Baldacconi did all he could for both the Italian and English faithful, but, well aware of the difficulty of looking after both Italians and Catholics of other nationalities simultaneously, he saw the need for an Italian chaplain to respond specifically to the needs of Italians in London. Despite this, he soldiered on alone till 1843. In 1842 Baldacconi founded the Italian Catholic Free School in Leicester Place, Saffron Hill. In the following year ill health compelled him to return to Rome, where he agreed to retire.

He was succeeded by Father Raffaele Melia, who in response to persistent requests from Baldacconi, was appointed co-Chaplain to the Sardinian Chapel, with specific responsibilities for just the Italian Catholics. Father Melia was the first member of the Catholic Apostolate, founded by St Vincenzo Pallotti (3), and as we will see, he was to be, together with Pallotti, a key figure in founding St Peter's (4).

Towards the end of 1832, don Raffaele Melia came to the conclusion that his true vocation lay in the missions, and in particular to work for England's return to the Church (5). Melia told Pallotti of his wish and asked him for leave to study English, so as to be able to become a missionary there. Pallotti, despite the fact that this would mean losing his valuable assistance, eventually agreed, and in fact advised him to put to one side all non-urgent commitments while pursuing his English studies.

After he had finalised arrangements with Fr Baldacconi, Fr Melia finally left for London in September 1844, with the blessing of Pope Pius IX. En route he stopped in Turin, where he met a brilliant young priest, don Giuseppe Faà di Bruno, to whom he passed on his enthusiasm for the work of the Pallottines. Along with Pallotti and Melia, he was to become the third actor in the story of the church, and after this encounter, Faà di Bruno decided to go to Rome and offer his services to Fr Pallotti. He was subsequently invited to go to London to help Fr Melia, and in time became the guiding spirit of the Italian Church in London, and an inspiration for Catholics all over England (6).

The arrival of don Raffaele Melia in England was greeted with enthusiasm by *The Tablet*, then the most widely read Catholic newspaper in the country (7). Don Raffaele's initial impression of London was, however, less positive. The letters he wrote at the time make no bones about the obstacles to pastoral activity amongst the Italian Catholic community, and in particular about the difficulty of having to minister to both the English and Italian congregations in the same building.

Fr Melia still had to celebrate mass in the Sardinian Chapel for the two communities, and the strains of this dual role were showing. Because he was not able to deliver a sermon to Italians during the mass, Fr Melia had to get them together on the Sunday afternoon for religious instruction. Then there were the feast days celebrated by one group that were completely unknown to the other community, and many devotions followed by one and not the other (8). Don Raffaele, given this constrain, asked to be able to celebrate a second Sunday mass, but was not allowed to do so. The need for a church specifically for the Italians was becoming more and more obvious. (9)

Don Raffaele spoke of this to Vincenzo Pallotti, who quickly grasped the situation. On April 10th 1845, he replied to a letter from Melia:

"The picture you paint for me of Catholics, Protestants, and of Catholicism in crisis there is extremely worrying. I have discussed it with Count Broglia [the Piedmontese minister plenipotentiary in Rome] and I have agreed with him to write to you to find another building to convert into a church and lodging for the priests. This way you can retain the role of chaplain to the embassy and some other priests can devote themselves to immigrants" (Amoroso 1996)

This can be regarded as the moment when the project for the Church of St Peter in London was conceived by don Raffaele and don Vincenzo Pallotti. On 23 July of the same year, Pallotti was not talking any more about a building but about land. Clearly he had begun to think of a purpose–built establishment.

"As regards land, I have said nothing to Count Broglia, but a private individual will perhaps write directly to the king, and if he is moved to do something, perhaps he will give the responsibility to someone over there whom he trusts to deal with the matter with your Reverence, and to act with the necessary caution…" (Amoroso 1997)

But it was really in the course of 1847 that the idea grew of creating an entirely new Catholic church for the Italian community in London. Fr Melia, who had identified a suitable site in Clerkenwell, returned to Rome after securing the approval of the Apostolic Vicar, Cardinal Wiseman. On December 7th 1847, Melia was authorised by the Congregazione di Propaganda Fide (England still being a mission country) to collect funds in Italian dioceses for building a church for Italians in London. Shortly afterwards, on the 25th February 1848, Melia was given a letter by the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops, Cardinal Orioli, requesting all Italian Bishops to support fundraising in their dioceses on behalf of the Italian church in London (fig. 1).

On June 18th 1848, Vincenzo Pallotti sent a petition to the Pope confirming that the priests of the Catholic Apostolate were collecting funds for the Italian church in London, and asked permission for the church to be built to be the permanent property of the Society. The Holy Father readily granted the request, and within a few years this small tie with destiny was to have a significant part to play in the survival of the Church (see note 1, chapter 3).

The First Steps

Fr Melia was away from London for the whole of 1848, following his unexpected appointment as Vice-rector of the Collegio Urbano di Propaganda Fide. Father Giuseppe Faà di Bruno had come to London at the start of 1847 and now took on responsibility not only for the spiritual guidance of the Italian Catholic community in London, but also for the Italian church project in Clerkenwell.

On September 27th 1848, don Raffaele di Melia wrote to the Apostolic Vicar Wiseman from Frascati:

" …My Brothers Pio and don Giuseppe Faà di Bruno have told me of your kindness towards the Italian sisters and your interest in the great project of the Italian church. […] The first time that I spoke of the Italian church with the Holy Father he told me that he wished the church to be dedicated to the leader of the Apostles. […] Given that the church must serve Italians and the faithful of all nations, we must choose an architectural style that satisfies everyone…" (Gaynor, 1962)

Thus it was Pope Pius IX, Giovanni Mastai Ferretti, who suggested that the Italian Church in London be dedicated to St Peter. He was also behind the second idea – that this church should open its doors to the faithful of other nationalities, indeed that it should be a *church of all nations.*

On his return to London in February 1849, Fr Melia and Fr Faà di Bruno resumed the hunt for a site for the Italian Church. Encouraging and guiding them throughout was Vincenzo Pallotti, who wrote to them from Rome:

"As far as possible, this Church should shine out with the glory of God, and should not have in it a single piece of art that could be a source of criticism. The Priests' house should be simple and humble [...]"

In the following months Vincenzo Pallotti began to involve himself personally in the construction of the Italian Church. On September 22nd 1849, Melia wrote from London to ask for his permission to sign the contract to buy a site in Victoria Street (present day Farringdon Road). This was Pallotti's reply:

"I am sending you the letter you requested for signing the contract, but I ask you to proceed with caution, and to do nothing without the appropriate precautions. Do not, for example, sign the contract without having the means

to pay or without the backing of a devout benefactor, so as not to compromise the reputation of the congregation." (Gaynor 1962)

The purchase of the site in Victoria Street did not go ahead however, because at the last minute the City of London authorities changed their mind. Pallotti stepped in once again on behalf of the Italian church, deciding to allocate to the project all the funds collected during the celebration of Epiphany in 1850. A few days afterwards however, on January 22nd 1850, don Vincenzo Pallotti passed away.

Melia and Faà di Bruno's hunt for a site focused on Clerkenwell because it was in this area, and in particular in the teeming and fetid alleys of Saffron Hill, that the Italian immigrant community was concentrated. It is difficult to establish exactly the number of Italian immigrants in London at this time, partly because the emigration process was fluid and poorly documented, but a plausible estimate would be of a community of about 2,000 souls by 1850. (10)

It was an immigration of the poor and the unskilled, people from the villages of the centre and south of Italy, driven by economic conditions that had been deteriorating in Italy since the end of the Napoleonic wars. Whilst there were a small number of craftsmen (picture framers and manufacturers of looking glasses, barometers and other scientific instruments) the majority of the immigrants were street tradesmen: organ grinders, knife grinders, ice cream and figurine sellers. When they arrived in England they could not speak the language, nor was it easy for them to learn, as they were for the most part illiterate. The street musicians and salesman needed someone to collect the money for them from passers by, and had young Italian boys brought over to do this for them. There were many instances of the guardians of these boys winding up in court on charges of living off the earnings of minors.

It is important to understand as well that at that time Clerkenwell witnessed not only an immigration of Italians but also a large influx of Irish Catholics. Midway through the century, following the Great Famine, hundreds of thousands of them were forced to leave their own country. Many of these Irish immigrants arrived in London, settling for the most part in the Clerkenwell area, which offered cheap accommodation only a few hundred yards from the City of London and the work it offered.

The problem of providing space for worship for the growing community of immigrant Catholics in Clerkenwell was initially solved by three small chapels being opened. St Peter & Paul in Rosoman Street opened its doors in 1847, St Brigid's in Baldwin Gardens in 1850 and the Holy Family Chapel in Saffron Hill in 1854 (11). But these only provided limited space, and could not meet the demands of Clerkenwell's rapidly growing Catholic population.

Buying the Land

Melia and Faà di Bruno were becoming increasingly absorbed by the search for a piece of land and the need to raise the necessary funds for building St Peter's. This was a particularly difficult job, for, despite the fact that relations with the Anglican church had on the surface improved since the days of Monsignor Challoner's clandestine services, the general attitude towards the Catholic church remained noticeably hostile. On top of this, the Risorgimento enjoyed considerable popular support in England at the time, making it difficult to raise funds for those regarded as being on the side of Pius IX. For this reason English Catholics were reluctant to offer their support to the Italian church project.

As if this were not enough, 1850 was the year of the *Papal Aggression*, a particularly torrid year for Catholicism in Great Britain. Cardinal Wiseman, recently appointed Archbishop of Westminster, affirmed in his pastoral letter of 7th October 1850 that the Pope had re-established a Catholic hierarchy in England, a statement that resurrected deep-rooted suspicions and ignited fierce reactions. Many violent incidents in streets up and down the country were recorded, part of the last great popular demonstration of anti-Catholic feeling in England.

In the Autumn of 1850, at the height of these anti-Catholic disturbances, Father Melia went to Italy to collect funds for St Peter's, and on his arrival he made an appeal to the generosity of the Italian people. On the 9th June 1851, Melia published in *The Tablet* an article formally announcing that the Italian church would be dedicated to St Peter at the express wish of the Holy Father:

"This church will be run in perpetuity by an order of Italian secular priests founded in Rome, so the spirit of Rome will always be there to guide and support it. No payment will be required for entry to this church; on the contrary, it will be open to everyone without charge. Confessors in all languages will be available […] attached to it will be a children's school for both boys and girls, and a priests' house […]. The site selected is freehold and will be the permanent property of the Church […] Donations for the Italian Church in London can be sent to the Cardinal Prefect for Propagation of the Faith, to Prince Doria Pamphili, to the Rector of San Salvatore in Onda in Rome, to Cardinal Wiseman, or to father Raffaele Melia, of 54 Lincoln's Inn Fields". (Gaynor 1962)

With anti-Papal feelings still running high at the time, Fr Melia's appeal did not pass unnoticed. The text was carried in newspapers, and quickly found itself the subject of a heated debate in the House of Lords. The Duke of Harrowby asked in a Parliamentary question:

"[...] If the Government was ready to use its influence at the Court of Rome to secure permission to erect a Protestant Church within the walls of the City of Rome for the practice of the Anglican faith [...]" (Gaynor, 1962)

The Bishop of London was present during this debate and commented with heavy irony on Melia's project for an Italian Church:

"In this country Catholics can take advantage as they please of places to celebrate their faith, but apparently this is not enough for them. On the contrary, although they know full well that they have ample places of worship, they have submitted a proposal to build a huge cathedral to St Peter in this city, whose metropolitan Cathedral is dedicated to St Paul. They are also keen to realise this project with no little publicity. I am sure they would not be concerned if we sought to execute a similar project in Rome [...] A sum of money has already been collected for such a purpose, and without recourse to the sale of indulgences…(hear hear!)" (Gaynor, 1962)

A few days later, on August 11th 1851, in an editorial laced with sarcasm, *The Times* reported the thrust of this debate. But Fr Melia did not allow himself to become discouraged by the strong hostility aroused by his appeal, and after recovering from a serious illness, set off at the beginning of 1852 to Italy, again in search of funds for the church. On this occasion, Melia visited not only the Papal States but also the Kingdom of Sardinia and Naples, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, and the Duchies of Modena, Parma and Piacenza.

The purchase of land in Farringdon Street could not be completed because of the objections raised by the City of London. However, a lucky break came in the form of the project to build Clerkenwell Road, and the accompanying compulsory purchases of land and buildings along the planned route. Parcels of land were being sold off, which, having been bought as parts of blocks, were not being used. After protracted negotiations, a piece of land at the southern end of Hatton Garden was acquired, right in the heart of London's Italian Community. The purchase contract was finally signed in December 1852.

This can therefore be considered as the point at which the firm foundations of the Church of St Peter were really laid. But there remained many obstacles to the actual construction, as well as the difficulty of collecting the necessary funds from the homeland and other countries. More than ten years would pass before the construction of the church was completed, and even then this was to be only partial.

Construction

In 1853 don Raffaele Melia published a pamphlet entitled "*The Church of St Peter: A rectory and Schools for Italian and Catholics of all nationalities*." The booklet, which carried on its cover the emblem of the Catholic Apostolate, explained what had been done to date on the actual building of the church, as well as an account of the activities of the Society. Fr Melia explained that from the start, the Church would be at the disposal of Catholics from every nation, and that there would be confessions in Italian, French, English and German. (12)

Everything seemed to be ready. The architect Francesco Gualandi of Bologna had completed the plans, which were based on a classic Italian Basilica (fig. 2) on the lines of the Basilica of St Chrysogonus in Trastevere in Rome (fig. 3). The architectural magazine *The Builder* carried illustrations of some details of the project on 14th May 1853, suggesting that work was about to begin. But the reality was somewhat different. (13)

After the land had been bought, funds remaining for the actual construction were low, and on top of this Melia and Faà di Bruno ran into yet another obstacle, which further delayed the construction. The tenants of some of the properties on Little Saffron Hill (present-day Herbal Hill) laid claim to a right of access across the land acquired for the building of the church. The only solution was to buy these houses, representing a further outlay of £650, expenditure that they could ill afford.

In 1854, with construction of St Peter's still being delayed, Fr Faà di Bruno started looking for a temporary solution for a place of worship for Italian Catholics, and asked the Rev John Kyne if he could rent the chapel of St Peter and Paul in Rosoman Street for three years. But an agreement was not reached, and the need to get on with building St Peter's became still more urgent.

In the meantime, Fr Melia had to turn his attention to events beyond the Italian church project. In 1855 Vincenzo Pallotti's successor, Fr Francesco Maria Vaccari, fell seriously ill, and Melia had no choice but to travel to Rome to assist him. Following Vaccari's death in January 1856, Melia was elected Rector General of the Catholic Apostolate, and had to base himself permanently in Rome, visiting London only infrequently. In the absence of Fr Melia, the responsibility for the construction of the church fell to Fr Faà di Bruno; management of the church finances had from March 1853 already been entrusted to Fr Pio Melia, Raffaele's Brother.

Money shortages continued to delay the start of work, and in October 1858 Fr Faà di Bruno began a tour of Europe in search of financial support, setting out from Piedmont, the place of his birth. He went first to Marseilles and Nice, then to Vienna and Poland, where he stayed almost a year. In June 1860 he was in Bohemia and Moravia, after an extended spell in Silesia, then returned to Austria before going to Rome at the end of 1861.

On his return to London, in September 1862, he found two pleasant surprises waiting. Firstly, Fr Raffaele Melia had returned to London, having resigned from the position of Rector General in Rome at the beginning of 1862; even better, construction work on the church was progressing well – as was reported in a letter to *The Tablet* of 26th July 1862:

"May I be permitted to draw readers' attention to a building which seems to have been disregarded by the Catholic press, but which deserves to be recognised. I am referring to the Church of All Nations, as it has been called from its conception, though now I believe we should really call it St Peter's. It is located at Hatton Wall, at the upper end of Hatton Garden. When completed, it will be a very handsome building, in the style of a Roman basilica, with galleries to increase the capacity. It is expected be able to hold between three and four thousand people. Right now rapid progress is being made, and a part of the Church will soon be completed and roofed. It will primarily serve Italians in London, many thousands of whom are currently without a church, and will be run by the religious community founded by don Vincenzo Pallotti…."

Some days after the appearance of this letter, on the 2nd August 1862, *The Tablet* recorded Cardinal Wiseman's visit to the construction site of the church, adding:

"The building will have three entrances, in Hatton Wall, Little Saffron Hill and Back Hill, close to Holborn Hall, the new underground station in Victoria Street. The roof will be completely finished within a month…"

But financial shortfalls and the pressing need to bring the church to completion gave Melia and Faà di Bruno no choice but to settle for only a partial realisation of Gualandi's original 1853 plans. These plans had envisaged a nave 2,000 feet in length, giving a capacity of 3,400 seats, and 5 entrances (fig. 4): two at the side, in George Yard and Back Hill, and three on the side of Little Saffron Hill (now Herbal Hill), on which there was to have been an imposing facade with a portico, based on the design of St Chrysogonus in Trastevere, Rome (fig. 5).

In the March of 1862, however, Melia and Faà di Bruno had to approve a plan by the Irish architect John Miller Bryson, which was a significant revision of Gualandi's original. This was based on the nave only being three-quarters of the length originally intended, with a total of just 2,000 seats, and on the plan for the facade and the portico on the Little Saffron Hill side being abandoned.

Consecration

It remained Melia and Faà di Bruno's dream to finish, in a matter of a few years, the remaining part of Gualandi's original plan, extending the nave at the end of the church and building the facade with the portico. However, don Raffaele and don Giuseppe were never to find the funds to complete the original plan, and the church was to stay in the dimensions we see today.

Not only was Bryson's plan significantly more modest than Gualandi's, but soon after the start of the work it became clear that the money available was inadequate for the completion of even this much reduced design. Fr Faà di Bruno found himself having to launch further collections for the completion of the church roof. The crypt supporting the church however, was completed in December 1862, with access from Back Hill. It was consecrated on Christmas Day, and religious services began then, before the rest of the Church was finished. On 17th March 1863, while construction was still in progress, Cardinal Wiseman visited the Church a second time to celebrate the consecration mass for the new church bell. (14)

On April 16th 1863, in an impressive ceremony, the Church of St Peter was itself finally consecrated. Notwithstanding the fact that it was smaller than had been originally envisaged, St Peter's evoked enormous admiration, its sheer size making a tremendous impression. It was the largest Catholic church in Great Britain at the time, and the only church at all in the country in the Roman Basilica style. (15)

The consecration ceremonies were spectacular, performed in the presence of eleven bishops, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster (16) and more than fifty priests, among them Benedictines, Dominicans, Capuchins, Augustinians, Marists, Oblati di San Carlo, Redemptorists, Serviti, and ten canons from the Metropolitan Chapter. Mass was celebrated by the Bishop of Edinburgh, Mgr Gillis, and a full orchestra played Haydn's No 3 Mass.

The solemn consecration of the church was followed a few days later by a rather unfortunate episode. Fr Pio Melia, who was in charge of the church finances, had personally signed the contract with the builder, one Charles Fish. The contract stated that the works would be completed for a total sum of £3,700; however, as often happens in these cases, there were some adjustments to the contract, leading to additional costs.

After the consecration, Fr Pio Melia decided to take a holiday in Italy, but the day after he set off, a warrant for his arrest was issued on behalf of the builder, who claimed that the Church still owed him money and that Fr Pio Melia was intending to leave for Italy to avoid paying the sums owed. Fr Melia immediately obtained a judicial order that forced the builder to rescind the warrant, and opened a civil action suit for unjust arrest. This case was heard in Croydon on August 19th 1863, but the judge did not accept the claim for damages for false arrest by Fr

Melia (17). The support of the Congregation of St Peter's was clear enough however, and a public subscription was raised with Fr Melia's permission, to cover his legal costs.

The Original Plan and the Later Modifications

At the time it was consecrated, the Church was not only much reduced from the original vision, but many areas were also incomplete. Finished were the internal three-nave structure, the choir, the presbytery and the crypt (fig. 6). But still incomplete, or not yet started, were the internal decorations, the bell tower (of which only the base was in place) the Presbytery on the Back Hill side (which was only in skeleton form and without a roof), the school building in George Yard and the meeting hall. In limbo were the extension of the nave and the creation of the facade and portico, although as we have noted, these were never realised because of the shortage of funds.

Inside, the structure of the church was largely similar to what we see today, but the original impression would have certainly been heavier and more sombre, given the almost total absence of decoration. The ceilings were divided in sections, unpainted, with ventilation grills (still visible today) made necessary by the use of candles and gas lamps for lighting. The side windows above the galleries were covered with heavy cruciform decorations, and below the side windows above the lateral naves were the galleries (fig. 7), access to which was via steps from below. These galleries contained several rows of seats, to make up for the reduction in capacity of the redesigned nave.

The pillars supporting the galleries were of York stone, as were the Ionic columns that separated the central nave from the lateral naves; these were progressively covered with plaster and painted with a marble effect. The canopy, or *Baldacchino*, with the four angels over the great altar was already complete, as was the inscription over the arch of the Sanctuary and the four large terracotta statues of the evangelists at the sides of the choir. The entrances to the sacristy from either side of the altar were not yet in place.

On the outside, the church was completely hidden by surrounding buildings, and its walls of bare grey cement were devoid of decoration. Clerkenwell Road had not yet been built (it was to come in 1878) and entry to the church was via the North side through the narrow alley on Back Hill, and on the South side via Hatton Wall. From there you could get to the church down a narrow passage in George Yard, and then on through to the main entrance, which was in the same position as the main entrance today, but without the present portico and loggia (fig. 8). The entrance at the back of the church, on the Little Saffron Hill side, was used only rarely, as there were still some houses awaiting demolition in the vicinity.

The original appearance of the church and a summary of the alterations planned for subsequent phases were described in detail in *The Builder*, which ended its review of the church thus:

"The total cost up to this point, including labour as specified in the contract and the costs of acquiring the land are in the region of £1,500, a sum which has been collected overseas by the priests of the church. It would probably be unfair to be critical of the church given its present incomplete state" (18)

The first major alteration was, in 1866, the completion of the presbytery on the Back Hill side, based on plans by the architects Wylson and Long. During the construction of the church, only the foundations of the presbytery were put down, leaving the Pallottine fathers without a home and in need of a temporary solution. The style of the church meant that the attics were particularly large, and the priests had to settle for makeshift and rather uncomfortable accommodation there till 1866.

The building in George Yard that housed the church school was officially opened in 1872, but in 1877, as part of the urban redesign associated with the opening of Clerkenwell Road, the architect Francis Tasker designed a new building (the present day home of the Central School of Ballet) on the eastern side of the church. This suggests

that that the hopes of extending the nave and the dream of a facade and portico on Little Saffron Hill were finally abandoned at around this time (19).

A major new thoroughfare, that would cut across the slum area south of the church, had been planned since the time of the original church design. The building of Clerkenwell Road, which was to be a real stroke of luck for the church, was strongly supported by the Pallottine fathers. It was finally finished in 1878 (fig. 9), and this new road system opened up a large area to the rear of the church, which the Pallottine fathers were to use to build shops to let (fig. 10). The chapel inside dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was built at the time of the opening of this road. The George Yard area was removed with the arrival of Clerkenwell Road, and the main entrance to the church, albeit a side entrance, was established on the new road. In 1891 Tasker completed the loggia and the facade above this entrance and in the same year completed the bell tower, in Roman Basilica style.

A few years earlier, in 1866, enough money had been collected to close the galleries (20), to decorate the sanctuary and the nave (1885-6) and install an impressive organ (1887). Scenes from the lives of Ss Peter and Paul were painted on the panels put in place to close off the gallery openings. These were by the Piedmontese artists Arnaud and Gauthier, who were also responsible for the frescoes and the other interior decorations of the church (originally the paintings were hidden away in a richly decorated cornice). Visitors never failed to be astonished at the beauty and sophistication of the decoration.

What today's visitor sees in the church, however, is rather different from the original. This in part reflects the restoration work done in 1920 by Fr Major (executed by Holloway Brothers Ltd.), but most of all the significant, if controversial restoration initiated by Fr Giuseppe de Filippi in 1953, after the church had been handed back to the Italian Pallotine fathers (21). The wonderful decorations and the cornices of the apse and of the naves were perhaps too sombre for 20th century tastes, and were covered over in white, leaving Arnaud and Gauthier's frescoes suspended in a peculiar sort of limbo.

More likely it was necessity rather than the prevailing tastes of the time that was at the root of such a radical step. The church was in a critical state, and many wooden beams had to be replaced; all the paintings inside the church were deteriorating, as were the interior walls and ceilings. Confronted by the scope and cost of putting this right, and not being able to make an appeal for financial contributions from the Italian community, the new parish priest could not contemplate a complete restoration of the paintings in the church. He therefore decided to give a single consistent colour to the walls and ceiling, leaving unchanged only the central paintings of the ceiling, the apse and the naves.

Even the organ, which was among the finest in England, was in need of urgent and major repair. Several organ restorers were consulted, who agreed that it would be impossible to find better material than that which had been used for the original. Thus the only solution was to re-use everything they could and replace all the material beyond saving with the best alternatives available. The cost of this work was about £20,000 in the money of the time.

In the 1970's further restoration took place in the church, following a fire in the nativity scene in St Joseph's chapel, which destroyed a 17th century painting and the original chapel decorations. In 1996 it was realised that a major programme of restoration was needed for the roof, and the internal refurbishment for this was completed in gold leaf.

2. The Life of the Church

From 1863 to the present day St Peter's has been the heart of the Italian community in London and an important focal point for all Italians in Great Britain. It has become not only a centre of worship but also the home for all kinds of activities - social, cultural and recreational. In this second chapter we will discuss some events in the life of the church, and look at the principal activities that the church has sponsored through its history and that characterise its life today.

The Church of All Nations

St Peter's was originally conceived to serve the faithful of all nationalities. However, on 13th April 1863, a few days after the consecration of the church, Cardinal Wiseman wrote to Fr Faà di Bruno, who had only just been appointed the first parish priest of St Peter's. This letter made clear his intention to limit the activities of the church to the Italian community alone, adding that sermons in English were not to be permitted.

Such a constraint, completely at odds with the original project – which had been approved by Wiseman himself - was met with strong opposition from the non-Italian Catholic community (particularly the English and Irish) living in the area around the church. Various petitions were signed and sent to Cardinal Wiseman in an effort to prevent this unexpected closure of St Peter's to non-Italian churchgoers, but the Cardinal was unmoved. However, the matter came up again when Wiseman died at the beginning of 1865 and was succeeded by Henry Edward Manning (1). The latter, himself a convert to Catholicism, took the view that the priests of St Peter's represented a real resource for creating converts beyond the Italian community and the ban was lifted.

On March 3rd 1869 Fr Faà di Bruno was appointed Rector General of the Society, and Fr Emiliano Kirner became Rector of the London House of the Apostolate in his place. This brought the number of priests in the house to five: Raffaele Melia, Emiliano Kirner, Raffaele Nenci, Domenico Crescitelli and Orazio Corbucci. Fr Melia remained at St Peter's till 1876, when, an elderly and infirm man, he returned to Rome, where he passed away in November of the same year.

Within a few years of its consecration, St Peter's had indeed become a church for all nationalities, attracting the faithful of many countries besides Italy. Confessions were soon being heard not only in Italian, but also in English, French, German and Spanish. The music attracted people of different faiths as well as different nationalities, and the crypt was used as a chapel for the Polish community.

At the time, the Polish Catholic community had their own church in London, in Gower Street, but when this was no longer available, they asked to be able to use the crypt at St Peter's to celebrate mass in their own language. Fr Faà Di Bruno, who had travelled extensively in Poland as part of his journeys across Europe to collect funds for the Church, agreed. The opening ceremony took place on 15th August 1878, in the presence of Cardinal Manning, and mass was said there for many years thereafter.

In fact, it was the Polish chaplain, Fr Bakanowski, who was celebrating high mass in the church during the Epiphany celebrations, when a bizarre incident took place. A detailed description of the events were reported in *The Tablet* of 17th January 1880:

"On Saturday 10th January, St Peter's Italian Church was the scene of an appalling outrage. During the course of a mass celebrated by Fr James Bakanowski, immediately after the beginning of the Creed, a pistol was fired at him from within the Church. The bullet buried itself in the altar. The altar server rushed immediately into the sacristy, closing the door behind him, preventing the priest from getting in. The assailant fired two more shots at Fr Bakanowski, missing him. The priest sought to take refuge behind the altar, pursued by the would-be assassin, and succeeded in making his escape while the gunman aimed two more shots at him. The assailant then

went behind the altar, knocking two large candlesticks to the ground, ran up the steps of the altar and flung open the door of the tabernacle then seized a pyx and a chalice, and brought down a ciborium containing about 300 consecrated hosts. In a matter of seconds the altar cloth caught fire. Witnessing this assault, the congregation were at first too terrified to move, but after a few seconds some of them surrounded the gunman, disarmed him of the pistol and the hatchet he was carrying, and soon afterwards marched him off to Clerkenwell police court." (2)

At the trial the assailant claimed to be a thirty five-year-old Swiss national called Schloss, a road layer who lived at 37, Great Saffron Hill. In fact, it was later discovered that he was a native of Milan. On February 11th 1880, Schloss was convicted of premeditated murder, and sentenced to life imprisonment. No motive was ever established for his attack.

Music

Music has always been important at St Peter's, originally as a means of attracting the faithful to church and to help collect funds to pay off construction debts. From the time of the consecration, the Church had a large orchestra and a well-known choir. Fr Faà di Bruno engaged Italian musicians employed in the theatres around Covent Garden, to play not only during the masses on Sunday and the other feasts, but also to give concerts of religious music.

Both Protestants and Catholics were drawn to the church by first-class performances of works by Palestrina, Pergolesi, Monteverdi and Rossini. Expensive-looking carriages would fill the streets around the church when concerts took place, and the newspapers of the day often reported the arguments which broke out over the purchase of entrance tickets and the scramble for the best seats. Often the only way to avoid an incident was to bring in more chairs from the sacristy and put them down the aisles to satisfy the enthusiastic audience. Rossini's "Stabat Mater" was so popular that it was performed the first Sunday of every month from 1863 until 1910, when it was declared a non-liturgical work by Pope Pius X.

The greater part of the collections taken during these concerts was used to repay construction debts. Indeed, notwithstanding its popularity, the Italian Church (as it soon came to be known), continued to be burdened with debt and fundraising was a constant task. Concerts formed only one part of this effort. (3)

Not everyone regarded musical performances as a good thing, however, and some commentators accused the priests of going too far in putting on concerts to raise money. In January 1869, *The Weekly Register* criticised St Peter's for placing a notice in the columns of *The Pall Mall Gazette* advertising the fact that high mass on Christmas Day would be celebrated to the accompaniment of works by Mozart;

"[...] The aim is to make money by attracting non-Catholics to their church and making them pay to enter. As such, we object to this event as an outrage and a blasphemy"

Even today St Peter's is keeping up its first rate reputation in the field of music. The church choir regularly puts on works by the great composers, and has frequently entertained internationally renowned soloists; Gigli, Siveri, Raimondo, and other singers from La Scala in Milan, the Opera House in Rome, and the Teatro San Carlo in Naples all sang at the church in the period after the Second World War.

Religious services

Right from the start, the size and central location of the Church of all the Nations made it the natural place to hold the most important rite of the Pallottines, the solemn celebration of the Octave of the Epiphany, initiated by St Vincenzo Pallotti in Rome in 1856. The first Octave in London was celebrated by the Pallotine fathers in 1866, faithfully following the Roman model, concelebrated with representatives of the various religious orders in London, including the Passionists, Dominicans, Carmelites and the Serviti. The priests of the other orders would

sing at the solemn masses and be on the altar on the morning of the main celebration. During the day there were sermons in English, German and Italian, and in the evening numerous sermons in English, with the blessing of important church figures. On the final evening the celebrations were usually led by the Archbishop of Westminster.

The Octave of the Epiphany was regularly celebrated at St Peter's for about thirty years: in 1893 however, the Pallotine fathers decided to suspend the celebrations, because of the dwindling number of faithful attending, the cost of organising the events, and above all because of the growing popularity of the celebrations for the feast of the Madonna of Carmine.

The feast day of the Madonna of Carmine is the 16th July, and on the first Sunday after this, the Italian community puts on a huge religious procession. It is one of the most popular and well-attended events of all those organised by Italians living in Britain. Every year, thousands of Italians come from all over London and the rest of the country to take part in the procession that snakes along the streets around St Peter's: Clerkenwell Road, Back Hill, Baker's Row, Farringdon Road and St Cross Street. The procession was held for the first time in 1883, and was in fact the first public Catholic event in the post-reformation period (Sponza, 1988). From 1896 the procession has been held every year, apart from wartime.

The procession was the defining annual event for Little Italy – the day would end with dances and dinners, with relatives and friends visiting each other's families – but many English and Irish people also joined in the festivities (4). Even today the day of the procession recalls the atmosphere of those 19th century days, with flags, floats, street decorations and men, women and children dressed in regional Italian costumes. Since the 1980's, the procession has effectively become a celebration of Italy - the streets are extravagantly decorated, and Italians descend on the area from all over England, giving the largest and most truly "Italian" event in London its unique atmosphere.

Caring for the Sick and the Imprisoned

Caring for Italians in English hospitals and prisons has always been one of the most important activities of the Pallotine fathers at St Peter's. In the 19th century there were two large prisons near the church, and the Catholics detained in them were looked after by the priests of St Peter's. The first of these prisons was the Clerkenwell House of Detention, built in 1845 for prisoners awaiting trial, and visited daily by Fr Domenico Crescitelli (5). In 1877 the prison was closed and the prisoners transferred; the site is today occupied by Hugh Myddleton School. The other was the Coldbath Fields House of Correction, where Fr Kirner and later Fr Crescitelli were chaplains, before it closed in 1885, having been in existence as a building since the end of the 18th Century. The site is now occupied by the Mount Pleasant Sorting Office, at the corner of Rosebery Avenue and Farringdon Rd. In 1868 there were on average about 400 prisoners in the two prisons.

Catholic priests' ministry in the prisons was authorised under the Prison Ministers Act of 1863. This legislation was intended to provide a chaplain for prisoners of any faith when the number of its adherents in a prison reached a certain level. In some cases this facility was offered as a matter of course, but in others it was largely left to the discretion of the prison authorities.

Fr Kirner was chaplain of the Coldbath Fields House of Correction, which he visited four days a week between 9.30 and 11.30, and on Sundays between 9 and 11am, to celebrate mass and lead prayers. Evening services for Catholics were not allowed, however, although they were for Anglicans. Moreover, Fr Kirner was only permitted to assemble all 400 Catholics in one place on the Sunday, making the logistics of his ministry particularly difficult.

Fr Domenico Crescitelli was chaplain to The Clerkenwell House of Correction, which he visited every day of the week for two hours, and on Sundays between 7.30 am and 9.30 in the morning. In 1870 the average daily number

of Catholics amongst the prisoners at Coldbath Fields was around 60. In 1876, Fr Crescitelli succeeded in starting up a fund to support the prisoners, and a year later launched another for helping released prisoners, "the Society for the relief of discharged Catholic prisoners". Amongst those underwriting this fund was Fr Nenci, the Rector of St Peter's.

The Italian Hospital at Queen Square was another institution that played an important part in supporting the Italian community, and was founded in 1884 by Commendatore Giovanni Battista Ortelli, a benefactor of St Peter's. Ortelli had built a successful business importing Italian cheese to London, and was prompted to found the hospital when he became aware of the difficulties experienced by his non-English speaking compatriots in London's hospitals. Ortelli was encouraged and supported in his ambition by the fathers of St Peter's, who became chaplains of the Hospital. The Hospital had to close in 1990 owing to financial problems.

Teaching and Propagation of the Faith

An Italian school had been in existence since 1817 near the Sardinian chapel; the successor to this was the Free Italian School founded by Fr Angelo Maria Baldacconi in 1842 in Leicester Place, Saffron Hill. On its opening, the school already had 40 pupils, and within a short space of time was offering evening classes for young people who were working during the day; by 1846 the number of pupils had risen to 200, all Italians. The Free Italian school was a rival to the Italian School at Hatton Garden founded by Mazzini, and to the school run by the Evangelicals; when these two closed, it was the only Italian school in London for the remainder of the 19th century. Melia and Faà Di Bruno succeeded Fr Baldacconi as Heads, and from then on the school was always run by the Pallotine fathers at St Peter's.

The school went through many reorganisations and several changes of location. After the Sardinian Chapel, it moved to Hatton Garden, and then to Greville Street. It settled next in the Crypt at St Peter's - despite the lack of natural illumination, which meant that that gas light was needed even during the daytime. It stayed there until a building became available in George Yard in 1872. Fr Nenci, who took over from Fr Kirner as Rector of the Italian Church, completed and consecrated the school's new home, with Archbishop Manning in attendance, on 11th November 1872. However, this building had to be demolished in 1877, when London County Council began its improvement programme for the Clerkenwell area, forcing the demolition of several buildings to open up new thoroughfares, among them Clerkenwell Road (6).

A little over a year later, on November 8th 1878, a new home for St Peter's School was opened in Little Saffron Hill (modern day Herbal Hill). The school occupied a three-storey building, designed by the architect Francis Tasker, and was split into three sections, for boys, girls, and younger children, with a total capacity of 600 pupils. The school enjoyed its greatest growth towards the end of the century (with around 3,000 new entrants), the high water mark of Italian immigration to England. As well as daytime courses in English, attended by many young Italians, and evening courses for working Italians, the school also had native Italian teachers so that young Italians attending the school could be taught in their mother tongue.

The Pallotine Fathers, and in particular Fr Pio Melia and Fr Kirner, were amongst the sponsors of the Italian Relief Association, a society which, with the help of the Italian consulate, rescued and sent back to Italy many destitute children caught up in the network of *padroni*. At the time it was common practice for children, bought or kidnapped in Italy, to be brought to England by the so-called *padroni*, who sent them into the streets to beg, play instruments or sell small statues. The Pallotine Fathers played a key role in the gradual suppression of this trade in Italian children.

The church has from its beginnings played an important role in the education of young people, Italians and non-Italians alike, by setting up St Peter's Schools. More generally, the Pallotine fathers at the church have been prominent in the religious education of London's Catholic community, writing and distributing important texts

on religious and social issues. (7) The volumes published by the priests of the church made a significant contribution to the conversion of many Anglicans to Catholicism, and one publication in particular, the book "Catholic Belief", ran to hundreds of thousands of copies in Britain and America, in more than 45 editions. Equally important was the commitment of the priests of St Peter's to founding new missions, in line with the key tenets of the Catholic Apostolate, and since the 1880's the church has been at the heart of an energetic expansion of new missions, in this country and overseas (8).

St Peter's Activities Today

Over the course of the years, St Peter's has sought to adapt to rapid changes in society and to respond to the needs of Italians in London. But the community that grew up around the church has changed enormously, for two main reasons. Firstly, there has been the profound shift in the cultural identity of the Italian community in the UK, while on top of this, there is really no longer an Italian community in the immediate neighbourhood of St Peter's. Today the Church finds itself having to work with a more dispersed community, scattered across a wide area, and in effect the conventional fabric of a parish around the church simply does not exist. In this very unusual situation, St Peter's sponsors a number of activities that make it not just the traditional point of reference for the wider Italian presence in the UK but also, and more importantly, the heart of a living and continually evolving local community.

The church and all its activities are linked to the Italian Province of the Catholic Apostolate founded by St Vincenzo Pallotti. St Peter's is today in the hands of Fr Carmelo di Giovanni and Fr Roberto Russo, who are the energetic driving forces behind a series of activities, both pastoral and social. (9)

As far as the pastoral side is concerned, the main activities are the celebration of weekday and Sunday mass (all the masses bar one are said in Italian) along with baptisms, first holy communion, confirmation, weddings and funerals; attached to each of these are courses in preparation for the sacrament. Over and above these, there are several one-off events. Since 1960, on the first Sunday of June, the parish has led a pilgrimage to Aylesford, where St Simon Stock had a vision of the Madonna del Carmine, and on the first Sunday after July 16th, the church organises the big procession in honour of the Madonna. On the first Sunday of November there is a service at Brookwood cemetery organised jointly with the Italian Embassy and Consulate and other Italian Associations to remember the Italian war dead. On the Sunday following, mass is said at St Peter's for the souls of the Italian internees who perished in the ship 'Arandora Star' en route to Canada in 1940.

As for the community activities, first and foremost is a full programme of visits to prisons and hospitals (see the letters reported in the two volumes by Fr Di Giovanni, 1989, 1994). Next in importance is the church's role as a drop-in centre, currently being expanded though the project to create a rehabilitation centre (the St Peter's Project). Then there is a series of clubs with a recreational theme: the Youth Club (for 6 to 17 year olds, run by a family committee), Pallotti's Club (for young people 18 years and up), the Social Club (for all ages) and the Club of the Third Age (run by a committee in conjunction with the ACLI).

There are also a number of activities run in partnership with the Italian Association, the Italian Embassy, Social Services and the local authority, with which St Peter's works particularly closely. Relations with the Diocese of Westminster have also been noticeably strengthened in recent years.

3. A Tour of St Peter's

The sight greeting someone entering St Peter's is frankly stunning; nothing on the outside of the church so much as hints at the size, the beauty and the artistic heritage of the church within. (1) This third chapter takes the reader on a guided tour of the interior of St Peter's, and reveals its hidden treasures.

Exterior

The facade consists of a loggia of brick and York stone, on three descending levels, which close with an entablature decorated with the papal coat of arms (fig. 11). The two arches of the portico are dominated by three alcoves: the central of these has a statue of Christ and the side alcoves statues of St Bede and St George. Originally there were two large mosaics between the alcoves, depicting Jesus and the Apostles. These mosaics were damaged during the First World War, and were replaced in the 1970's by modern mosaics showing the miracle of the fish, and Jesus giving the Keys of Heaven to St Peter. Above the facade can be seen the bell tower, executed in classical style, 33 metres high.

There are two important plaques in the loggia; the first of these, installed in November 1927 by the National Association of War Veterans, commemorates the 175 immigrants who lost their lives fighting in the Italian Army in the First World War. The second is a bronze plaque, designed by Mancini in 1960, which commemorates the 446 Italians who perished in the 'Arandora Star' tragedy.

The tale of the 'Arandora Star' is of one of the saddest events to befall the Italian community in England. (2) On June 10th 1940 Italy declared war on Great Britain; in the days that followed thousand of Italians between the ages of 17 and 70 were arrested and either sent to the Isle of Man or deported to Canada and Australia. The Italians resident in London and other cities in England were held at a transit camp at Kempton Park, about 20 kilometres from London. Over a two-week period they were taken under military escort to the Isle of Man and dispersed between various internment camps. But not everyone was taken to these camps: about 200 young men were deported to Canada, while another 700 were to be shipped off on the 'Arandora Star', a cruise liner, which was also carrying about 100 German internees. Off the Irish coast the ship was hit and sunk by a German submarine; 714 people lost their lives, among whom were 446 Italians. The handful of survivors were sent to Australia on the steamship 'Donera', with the exception of 43 prisoners who had been adrift in the water the longest after the shipwreck, suffering terribly as a result; these men were instead left on the Isle of Man, in the Palace internment camp.

Interior

The interior is made up of three naves divided by two aisles, each with seven Ionic columns of York stone (fig. 12). (3) The aisles of columns finish in two spectacular arches that tower above the Sanctuary (fig. 13). On these arches is inscribed in Latin the phrases that mark the foundation of the Catholic Church; "*Tu es petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam*" and "*tibi dabo claves regni caelorum*". Above the first of these Sanctuary arches is a roundel with the portrait of Pope Leo XIII (fig. 14), who was Pontiff at the time that the interior decoration of the church was completed, in 1886; above the other arch is the Papal Coat of Arms. The colonnades are topped by blind arches, which hide the galleries above. In the central nave there is also the hexagonal pulpit faced with marble, supported by a fluted column.

The High Altar (fig. 15-16) is surmounted by a canopy, supported by four marble columns decorated in black and gold, with white marble capitals and high bases of composite style. Above the canopy are four gilded statues of Angels. The High Altar, the tabernacle and the steps leading up to it are all of Italian marble. At the sides of the High Altar, the Chapel of Our Lady (now dedicated to St Vincenzo Pallotti) and the Chapel of St Joseph

together form a wide transept. The statues of the four evangelists, two at each side of the high altar, are of terracotta and were purchased at the international exhibition of 1862.

The steps leading to the Sanctuary are of anacrinitic marble, while the balustrades that separate the Sanctuary from the rest of the church were built by Broder & Broder and as such are of particular interest. Their central sections are of porphyry, surrounded by antique green marble, with an ornamental border in red marble and cipollino marble. The cornice is of Turkish alabaster, with a winding band of antique marble the length of the balustrade. Columns of porphyry at the bases divide the balustrades and the capitals are made of Devon marble. On the left, as you look at the altar, there is a statue of St Peter, a copy, reduced in scale, of a statue in St Peter's in Rome.

Under the Sanctuary and the side chapels is the crypt, now closed, which was capable of holding 200 people; the entrance to this had been from the door to the church on Back Hill.

Decorations

The decoration of the Sanctuary and the naves, completed between 1885 and 1886, was entrusted to two Piedmontese artists – Arnaud di Caraglio and Gauthier di Saluzzo. The two artists worked for 10 months, and the church was reopened to the public on 16th May 1886. Arnaud supervised all the work, and he was personally responsible for the frescoes and the paintings in chiaroscuro; the paintings in the central nave that show episodes in the lives of St Peter and St Paul are Gauthier's work. The style, the use of colour, and the way the figures are drawn are unique in Great Britain. *The Tablet* of 15th May 1886 reported the verdict of the *Journal of Decorative Art:*

"Taken together the decorations are extremely handsome, and we do not believe it is an exaggeration to say that when completed, the interior of the Italian church will be one of the finest examples of ecclesiastical decoration in Great Britain. We therefore strongly recommend a visit…"

The ceiling of the central nave is dominated by a superb fresco by Gauthier, showing the triumph of St Peter surrounded by angels carrying the symbols of his authority and of his martyrdom (fig. 17). The other panels of the ceiling were at one time also richly decorated (fig. 18), similar to the spaces between the side windows (fig. 19) and the glass of the windows themselves (fig. 20). Below the windows, along the central nave, there are some noteworthy paintings by the same artist; on the left as you look at the Altar we see St Peter being called by Jesus, his ministry and his ultimate martyrdom (fig. 21-23), while on the right we have scenes from the life of St Paul (fig. 24-26).

On the ceiling of the sanctuary there is a fine fresco of Paradise, with the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary, the four Doctors of the Church (Ambrose, Augustine, Athanasius and John Chrysostom), the founders of certain holy orders and other saints and angels, all offering prayers and incense to God (fig. 27).

The fresco on the apse above the high altar shows the Saviour ascending to heaven, giving his blessing to his Mother and the Apostles (fig. 28-29). At the sides we see the Prophet Isaiah gazing upon Christ (fig. 30), and the Prophet Jeremiah seated at the ruins of the Temple, mourning its destruction (fig. 31). Below the prophets there were at one time frescoes of Christ giving communion to St Peter and of Christ washing the feet of the Apostles. Behind the Altar, at the centre of the Apse, there is a magnificent oil painting of the Annunciation by the Viennese artist Einler.

Looking up, towards the side chapels, we see the statues of St Peter and St Paul above the entablature of the pillars of the apse. The apses of the chapels of Our Lady and St Joseph are divided into three parts, each one decorated with angels carrying symbols and trophies to the Queen of Heaven and St Joseph (fig. 32). The roundels above each Apse show St Peter (fig. 33) and St Paul (fig. 34).

The chapel of St Joseph (fig. 35-36) has a statue of the Saint in an alcove above a marble altar, and is flanked by large panels of modern mosaics (completed at the time of the restoration work of 1953) showing the Holy Family in Nazareth and during the Flight to Egypt. On the side wall of the chapel, between the statues of St Mark and St John, an oil painting of the Crucifixion, painted by Cyril Mount in 1975, has replaced a 17th Century painting that had stood there until it was destroyed in the fire of the early 1970's.

On the opposite side of the transept, the chapel that was originally dedicated to Our Lady (fig. 37-38) is laid out in a similar fashion. It now features a recent mosaic of St Vincenzo Pallotti together with Fr Raffaele Melia and Fr Faà di Bruno, and another of the Saint standing before St Peter. At the centre of the apse there is a statue of St Vincenzo, and on the side wall of this chapel, between the statues of St Mark and St Luke, the most important work of art in the whole Church – an oil painting by Alessandro Turchi (known as l'Orbetto) dating from 1640, depicting the Beheading of St John the Baptist (see Finaldi, 2000)

Half way up the side walls of the chapels are large windows which had at one time been covered by paintings done on flax using the "semi-transparent" method; its use in St Peter's was the first time this method of painting was seen in England (fig. 39-40). The paintings that are there now, copies of the originals, depict the "Transfiguration" and "The Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane". On the chapel ceilings we see Angels carrying scrolls inscribed with *"Ave Maria Grazia Plena*" and *"Joseph Vir Mariae"* (fig. 41-42).

Side Chapels

A series of altars and chapels enhance the lateral naves. Starting at the entrance to the church, we will make our tour in an anticlockwise direction, following the Stations of the Cross (these are of plaster, with red and gold cornices, in Renaissance style).

Next to the entrance is the holy water font, faced with marble on a carved pedestal. The font is dedicated to Fr Chiapponcelli, an immigrant who lived in the area, entered the Pallottine order and later became parish priest at St Peter's. On the floor there was at one time a stone dedicated to the architect of the church, John Miller Bryson.

The first alcove we come to is dedicated to St Anthony of Padua; the Statue of the Saint is of plaster and the two flower stands are faced in marble (fig. 43). Continuing along the nave we come to a statue of Saint Franca, patron saint of the Val d'Arda, and then a wooden statue of St Calogero. A little further on, almost at the back of the church, is the Chapel of the Sacred Heart, built in 1880 at the time of the opening of Clerkenwell Road (fig. 44), and restored in 1920 (fig. 45). The walls and the Chapel altar are of white marble, while the statue of the Sacred Heart itself is in a recess above the altar, lit from a window above. The balustrade in front of this altar is decorated with miniature Corinthian columns.

A little further on there is a 17th century crib from Naples, a copy of a work by the master Aniello D'Antonio. At the rear of the church, where the baptismal font used to be, is a mosaic of St John baptising Christ, and flanking this are two plaques, one to the memory of Fr Raffaele Melia, the other dedicated to Fr Emil Watson Taylor.

Also at the rear of the church, towards the central nave, is the loggia for the choir with the magnificent organ, justly famous for its wonderful tone (fig. 47). The original organ, built in the workshop of the Belgian craftsman Anneesens, was regarded as the finest in the country at the time of its installation in 1880, and won an award at an international exhibition in Birmingham that same year. The organ we see today is the result of two phases of restoration; the first in 1959 by Walker & Sons, which used many features of the original organ, and the more recent by Michael Broadway in 1995.

Continuing a little further, we pass in front of the Mater Dolorosa, a Pieta in the style of Mayer (fig. 49). Coming now to the nave on the opposite side of the church, we find ourselves before a crucifix, which is used during Holy Week for the celebration of the Easter triduum (fig. 48). In the chapel next to this, there is the imposing statue of Our Lady of Carmine, the true focus of worship for Italians in London. The front of the altar is of marble scagliola in clear blue, and on the altar itself are mosaics of St Catherine and St Francis.

Still walking anti-clockwise along this nave, we see successively the wooden statues of St Rita and Michael the Archangel, and a plaster statue, from Naples, of St Lucia. This statue was presented to the church by the Terroni family as an offering when one of the children was suffering with an eye illness, and by tradition it is carried by family members during the July procession.

We are now back at the secondary entrance of the church, the end of our visit. Down the stairs is Back Hill. Off the time machine, back to reality.

NOTES TO THE TEXT

Chapter 1

(1) Catholics were not allowed to engage in the instruction of young people, on pain of life imprisonment. A Catholic could be disqualified from succeeding to an inheritance if a non-Catholic relative claimed his own right to the inheritance, while son who renounced Catholicism to and converted to Protestantism could even take over his parents' estate while they were still alive.

(2) The first Catholic Emancipation Act was only passed in 1778, and sparked off fierce unrest, culminating in the "Gordon Riots" of 1790. In 1791, however, Catholics were granted freedom of worship, and in the period that followed the first Catholic churches were built in England. By 1829 almost all anti-Catholic legislation had been removed, and in 1850 the catholic Hierarchy was re-established in England.

(3) Vincenzo Pallotti was born in Rome in 1795 and was ordained priest in 1818. He firmly believed that all Christians, not just those in holy orders, were called by Christ to play a role in the Church and in the world. In order to put this idea into action, he founded in 1835 the Society of the Catholic Apostolate, with the aim of bringing together lay and religious to take the faith into the world. Don Vincenzo died in Rome on January 22nd 1850, in the Church of San Salvatore in Onda. He was beatified by Pope Pius XII on 22 January 1950, and canonised By Pope John XXIII in January 1963.

(4) Raffaele Melia was born in 1804 in Rome, where he also completed his studies and was awarded a doctorate with distinction in Theology. While a boy, he met Vincenzo Pallotti in the Young People's Congregation at Santa Maria del Pianto, where he became Director in 1829. They were subsequently together at Santa Maria dei Divoti at Gianicolo, where they met to follow the Spiritual Exercises. They were together once more at the Urban College, Melia as Deputy Director and Pallotti as Spiritual Father to the students, till 1833. In 1837 Melia went to join Pallotti at the Society's first Headquarters, in the Church of the Holy Spirit in via Giulia.

(5) Pallotti had this to say about the Conversion of England: "England today is a nation whose influence is extensive and powerful because of the number and importance of its colonies, because of the breadth of its trade, the shadow cast by its wealth, and the tremendous power of its navy, which dominates virtually every ocean and gives it access to every country. So the day that this becomes a Catholic country, our religion would be assured of a new means, both easier and swifter, to reach out across the earth […] In converting this country to the true faith we would in effect be converting those innumerable populations over whom it reigns or over whom its army as good as gives it power " (Amoroso, 1997, n1 p 20).

(6) Giuseppe Faà di Bruno was born in 1815 in Masio to an aristocratic Piedmontese family (he was the second son of the Marchese Faà di Bruno, and the brother of the Blessed Francesco). A Doctor of Theology, he went to Rome after meeting Fr Melia in 1844 to study the work of the Catholic Apostolate. Deeply moved by the Society and the world in which it worked, don Giuseppe entered the Apostolate to play his part, putting himself at the service of Vincenzo Pallotti. After a short time, Faà di Bruno, who spoke English, realised that his true vocation was to work for the Conversion of England, and in 1846 raised this with Pallotti. As with the similar request by Melia, it was a difficult decision, and Pallotti admitted in a letter to Melia that he was seriously tempted to keep Faà di Bruno with him in Rome. But the latter left for London in January 1847, to help Fr Melia at the Royal Sardinian Chapel

(7) "A priest of great distinction, don Raffaele Melia, a true model of the Catholic Priesthood, has been asked to continue the work initially entrusted to Fr Baldacconi. The piety, cultured manner and friendliness of Fr Melia are very much noted in the correspondence that comes from Rome…" (Gaynor, 1962).

(8) To make matters worse, the Sardinian Chapel was divided into two sections: one larger with paying seats, and another, smaller, for people standing. The part with seats was practically empty, while the other was bursting at the seams, and many people simply did not go to mass to avoid being squashed by the crowd of non-payers.

(9) The need for a Church for Italian Catholics was made more urgent by the activities of some apostate Italian priests who were going from door to door to persuade fellow countrymen to join the Anglican Church. On top of this, the Church of England opened a refuge for Italian boys who had ended up on the streets begging for unscrupulous *padroni.*

(10) An estimate by the *Dublin Review* puts the number of Italian Immigrants in London in 1851 at about 4,500, but this figure seems to be a serious overestimate, and the assessment by a writer for *The Tablet* of about 2,000 in 1857 is probably nearer the mark. The most reputable source, the authoritative work by Lucio Sponza on Italian immigration into Britain in the 19th century, offers an estimate of about 2,000 in 1864, 3,500 in 1881, and about 11,000 in 1901.

(11) Only St Peter and Paul survives, in present day Amwell Street.

(12) The text said, amongst other things, that " a considerable quantity of marble had already been brought from Italy and is already at the site of the new church. There are four columns from Portovenere, four columns from Siena […] and two altars of white marble". These materials had been bought in Rome in 1851 by Fr Melia, for a total cost of around £500 (Gaynor, 1962).

(13) One of Gualandi's relatives in Bologna offered some very interesting insights into the way the project was put together: "On the first trip he made to France and England, in 1849, he [Gualandi] was fortunate enough to be taken on as a partner by an engineer working for the Sardinian Embassy in Paris. He was carrying out surveys, visiting and making various studies on the French railways. On this same trip he went to London and was commissioned to design a new Basilica of some 30,000 square feet. This was to be in London itself, for Italians. This meant that he had to return several times in subsequent years to discuss and arrange the dates for the work, to make the necessary surveys and to obtain details from the client. Subsequent developments in this important project led to so many changes of size, style and design, that Gualandi had to produce more than five different sets of plans and designs […]. Then, when the land had finally been purchased, the design selected was similar to the drawing carried in the magazine "*The Builder*" on May 14th 1853. Now we are waiting for the start of work to destroy the buildings currently on the site and get the project going."

(14) This was the biggest bell in any Catholic church at the time in England. Two metres tall, seven metres across, and weighing three and a half tonnes, the bell, made by Vickers in Sheffield, was displayed at the International Exhibition of 1862. Until the Bell tower itself was completed, several years later, it had to be left outside in George Yard, the area opposite the main entrance to the church.

(15) Westminster Cathedral was not completed until 1903.

(16) Other Bishops present were Grant (Southampton), Gillis (East of Scotland), Ullathorne (Birmingham) Roskell (Nottingham), Amherst (Northampton), Turner (Salford), Morris (Troy), Browne (Newport), Cornthwaite (Beverley), Browne (Shrewsbury) and Geoghan (Australia)

(17) In the course of the trial Bryson, the architect, testified that according to his estimates the total costs relating to the construction of the church came to £ 5,638, and that this amount had already been paid to the builder, who was demanding a further £2,800. Bryson stated that in his opinion the builder had already been overpaid by £25, and that the further money now being sought had no basis whatsoever.

(18) "The New Italian Church of St Peter's, Hatton Wall, Hatton Garden", (26th September 1863).

(19) Tasker, who took over from Bryson for the final phase of construction, was the nephew of Countess Tasker, a wealthy London catholic. She was amongst the Church's benefactors, and provided a significant portion of the funds for building the school and the presbytery.

(20) The seats in the gallery offered only a very restricted view of the altar, and after being closed off with wooden panels, the galleries were used as a temporary home for the school. The closure of the galleries brought the final capacity of St Peter's down from 2,000 to 1,500; Gualandi's original plans had been for a Church seating 3,400.

(21) On the division of the Province after the Second World War, the church came under the Irish Province, which also took on the Italian priests. In 1952 however, given that there were fewer and fewer Irish priests who spoke Italian, and that increasing numbers of Italians had emigrated to London in the post-war period, the Father General agreed that St Peter's should be attached to the Italian province. In this unique case therefore, the Church remains an individual parish for Italians in London, and forms part of the Westminster Diocese.

Chapter 2

(1) Gaynor (1962) suggests that Wiseman's real intention was to take control of St Peter's with a view to making it a Catholic Cathedral for London.

(2) According to another version of events, reported in *The Tablet*: "Towards half past ten, while Fr Bakanowski was celebrating Mass on the High Altar, a man entered the church without removing his cap, shouting at the Congregation "*You go away!"*, and then, running up the steps that led to the altar, pulled out a pistol and fired a shot at the priest. The latter ran to the sacristy, followed by his attacker, who fired again. Fortunately, Fr Bakanowski succeeded in escaping, and the assailant then turned on Fr Arkell, a priest at the church, who had come out on hearing the shots. Some shots were fired at Fr Arkell. The gunman then ran behind the altar, throwing to the ground everything on it. Leaving the sanctuary, he came at Fr Arkell in the nave, but the latter seized his arm and took the revolver. He then tried to stab the priest, but with the assistance of a servant (Elizabeth Brooks) who sustained several cuts to her hands, he was finally stopped. With the help of some worshippers, and some policemen who had came swiftly on the scene, the knife was taken from the assailant, and the flames of the burning altar cloths were extinguished." (Gaynor, 1962)

(3) In 1865, Prince Umberto of Savoy, later King, on a visit to London, attended solemn mass at the Church, and made a handsome donation toward the fundraising effort. In 1872, Pope Pius IX gave the church a magnificent golden chalice, a sign of his special concern for the church and for the Italian community in London

(4) "By the end of the last century, this had become a real red letter day for all Italian immigrants, and every year, some outstanding cultural event was put on. Flowers, flags, bunting, coloured lanterns, statues of Saints and altars decorated the streets of Little Italy. Every member of the Italian community put on their best clothes, men with bright red or green ties, the ladies with scarves of silk or handmade lace. Those who were taking part in the procession would walk for about two hours, while the onlookers would admire the singers, the groups of children, the prayers and the vestments worn by the Priests. In the evening, when the church doors closed, the streets of Little Italy took on a carnival atmosphere, and ran with the finest Italian wine. Everyone, rich and poor, would celebrate, singing and dancing to the accompaniment of accordions and

barrel organs. The street party would usually carry on into the small hours of the morning." (from an article that appeared in *"Back Hill"*, the magazine of the Italian Community)

(5) In 1867 among the inmates were the Fenian prisoners Bourke and Casey; a group of their confederates on the outside, led by one Michael Barrett, attempted to "spring" them by dynamiting a section of the prison's outer wall. The plot itself failed, but the effects of the bomb were devastating – twelve people were killed by the blast, with another twelve seriously injured. As well as the attempt failing, Barrett was captured and shortly afterwards hung. He was in fact the last man to be publicly executed in Britain. (Gaynor 1962).

(6) The Tablet of 29th February 1877 reported that "….as a consequence of the completion of the road improvements, the Italian church has undergone some important alterations. The thoroughfare in the course of construction between Oxford Street and Shoreditch, cutting across Hatton Garden, will run along the Southern side of the building and pass across the present site of the school. During the demolition of the schools and their reconstruction on nearby land, the galleries will be closed and the children will be taught in premises in the area. The alterations planned for the church will be indeed impressive. The church will be extended by about thirty feet, and the altar moved to the eastern end, from the western side where it is now [this was never in fact done]. The main entrance will be on the new road, at the spot presently occupied by the presbytery. The interior will be completely redecorated, and those features currently unfinished will be finally completed."

(7) "Directory for the year of 1847 for Italians living in London. Holy days of Obligation, devotional Days, Days of Abstinence and Indulgences" (Dr. Raffaele Melia, 1846); "The Unfortunate condition of the Italian Mission in London, Its importance for Italians, and the assistance it needs" (Melia, 1850); "St Peter's Church: the Rectory, the School for Italians and for Catholics of all nationalities" (Melia, 1853); "A discourse on the Catholic Faith" (Dr. Giuseppe Faà di Bruno, 1857); "Confession" (Melia, 1865); "Maguire and his sermons on the Smithfield Martyrs (Faà Di Bruno, 1865); "Our Blessed Lady for every generation" (Melia, 1868); "The life of a servant of Don Vincenzo Pallotti" (Melia, 1871); " Catholic belief" (Faà Di Bruno, 1875); "Sermons on the Passion" (Fr Bernard Feeney, 1883); "The Host of the tabernacle, or Visits to the Blessed Jesus" by the Rev, mons. Daniele Gilbert, DD Vic. Grale (Faà di Bruno, 1885); "Duty and difficulties in the home" (Feeney, 1885).

(8) In the first few years after the foundation of the Church, the following missions can be recorded: Foundation of the College for the Missions of St Patrizio, at Masio, completed in 1878; Foundation of the Church of Our Lady, Star of the sea, Hastings, 1883; Foundation of the Church and school of Our Lady of Carmine, New York, 1884; Purchase of the Church and Pallotine House of San Silvestro in Capite, Rome, 1885; Foundation of the Church and Pallotine House, Montevideo, Uruguay, 1886; Foundation of the Church and College of St Patrick, Mercedes, Argentina, 1886; Foundation of the Church and Pallotine House, of St Aloysius, Valparaiso, Chile, 1888.

(9) Fr Roberto Russo passed away on 2nd April 2001.

Chapter 3

(1) The Italian Church has been accorded Grade II status as a building of national interest by the Ministry of Culture, on the Recommendation of English Heritage.

(2) A full account is given by Bernabei (1997).

(3) The Church is 46 metres long, 20 metres wide, and 19 metres high. Each lateral nave is 29 by 6 metres, and 7 metres high, while the Galleries are 29 metres in length, and 3.5 metres wide.