

San Patrizio a Villa Ludovisi



St Patrick's at the Villa Ludovisi is a 20th century national and titular church in the rione Ludovisi. Until 2015, it was also conventual. The dedication is to St Patrick, apostle and patron of Ireland.

This used to one of the two national churches of Ireland, the other being Sant'Isidoro a Capo le Case, until 2015. However, from 2017 it is the place of worship of the American expatriate community in Rome.

History

The remote origin of the church lies in the lost ancient church of San Matteo in Merulana near the Lateran, which was given to the Augustinian Friars in 1477. The community there was predominantly Irish by the early 18th century, and have kept this identity from then on. However, they lost their church when the

French demolished it in 1810. To compensate, they were given Santa Maria in Posterula in 1819, which was an old monastic church of a defunct order of monks called the Celestines.

This church and its attached convent was right next to the river in the rione Ponte, to the east of the Ponte Sant'Angelo. Unfortunately, this meant that it was doomed once it was decided to enclose the Tiber in embankments to stop its regular floods. The complex was condemned and demolished as a result in 1888, and the friars had to find a new home.

Fortunately for the community (although not for civilization), the famous Villa Ludovisi with its delectable gardens had just been sold off by its owner, the site cleared and the land divided up into building lots. This happened in 1885, despite international outcry. The friars obtained a large corner plot in the new neighbourhood, and laid the foundation stone of their new convent in the year that the old one was destroyed.

The architect was **Aristide Leonori**, and the main mover was one of the friars called Fr Patrick Glynn who came from Limerick. The project called for a very substantial church with an attached convent in a coherent design, but unfortunately the cost stretched the funds available. The friars had to give up the project by 1898.

A very odd interlude then took place. The unfinished complex was obtained by a community of Benedictine nuns which had been founded on the Via di San Nicola da Tolentino in 1895 -see San Benedetto de Urbe. Diego Angeli, writing in 1903, had this to say:

"San Benedetto Abate. There is a small church attached to a convent of English Benedictine nuns in the Via Boncompagni. It was built in 1899, the architect being Alberto Manassei. In 1901 the church was taken from the nuns, and given to the Augustinians. The ceiling vault and the apse are decorated with frescoes. On the main altar is an altarpiece of The Blessed Virgin, a copy of an original by Carlo Maratta at San Carlo al Corso. To the left is the chapel of St Benedict, with a copy of an icon kept at San Benedetto in Piscinula."

The architect Manassei is famous for his Palazzo delle Assicurazione Generale, which is the massive building on the east side of the Piazza Venezia.

Something horrible happened in 1901, but details are hard to come by. The monastery was suppressed, and the property ended up with the Irish Augustinians again.

Blessed Columba Marmion wrote this in a letter in 1901:

Leggo sui giornali inglesi che le Benedettine inglesi, da tempo stabilitesi a Roma, sono all'origine di un terribile scandalo!
(I read in the English press that the English Benedictine nuns, for a time established in Rome, are the source of a terrible scandal!).

The friars went on to finish the church that they started, but seemed to have sold off the nuns' church for the building of a hospital. The last mention of it is in 1903, when it seems to have been demolished after standing for only five years.

The friary church was completed and opened in 1911, twenty-three years after its inception. It had no major subsequent history of note for the rest of the 20th century. The friars were successful in making it a center of Irish expatriate and pilgrim life in Rome until 2015.

The Irish Augustinian friars suffered a complete collapse in vocations towards the end of the 20th century. As a result, in 2015 they closed the friary here, and withdrew from most of their pastoral obligations in Ireland itself. This put an end to the Irish presence at San Patrizio.

The American expatriate community at Rome is now worshipping here permanently, since 2017. This is owing to a long-standing disagreement over the use of the church of Santa Susanna, leading to the closure of that church. The move was facilitated by contacts in the Vatican, who were concerned about the future of the church after the Irish departure.

The community is now the "St Patrick's American Community in Rome", having changed its name. It is provided with pastoral care by the Paulist Fathers (Missionary Society of St. Paul the Apostle) of the United States.

The church was made titular in 1965, and there have been four cardinals: William Conway (1965-77), Tomás Ó Fiaich (1979-90), Cahal Daly (1991-2009) and Thomas Collins (from 2012).

Exterior

The church is basilical in plan, and is large. Firstly, there is a two-bay narthex which is incorporated into the convent. Then follows a four-bay nave with aisles, the bays being deep. Finally there is a semi-circular external apse. There is no transept, but the aisles have little apses at their far ends.

The roofs of the main nave and the apse are pitched and tiled, but the aisle roofs are flat. The fabric is of pink brick, with some stone detailing especially on the façade. There seems to be no campanile.

The church is on a corner site, and so has a prominent civic presence. The left hand side wall fronts the Via Abruzzi, and the apse looms over a filling station on the Via Sicilia. These external walls are rendered in a pinkish red, and the rooflines have stone cornices with dentillations. Below the rooflines of the nave, aisles and main apse are lines of stone tracery in the form of pendant arcades of semi-circular arches -these run above the side apses.

The aisle walls have eight tall round-headed windows each, with archivolt above looking like eyebrows, but the main nave side walls have only four windows each. The apses have no windows.

Façade

The church façade is incorporated into the convent frontage as one piece of design, which is described as Tuscan Romanesque. Here, the pink brick is unrendered. The main gabled façade fronts the central nave, while the two identically designed convent blocks flanking it, slightly recessed, front the aisles.

The design is complex. There are two storeys. The single doorway is in a mediaeval-style arched doorcase with three orders of molding enclosing a tympanum with a mosaic depicting *St Patrick Being Commissioned by Pope Celestine I*. This doorway has a porch or prothyrium with a gable, and this is supported on a pair of spindly grey marble Composite columns. Flanking the entrance is a pair empty of round-headed niches sheltered by molded archivolt supported by free-standing columns in the same style. The walling in this part of the first storey is in brick.

Above the top of the entrance arch, and partly obscured by the porch gable, is a wide frieze of vine-leaf decoration that runs across the entire frontage including the convent blocks. This is in stone. Also in stone is the entire horizontal zone above it, which has a recessed portion containing windows behind an arcade of nine arches separated by more of the same sort of columns. This is sheltered by a projecting cornice with modillions which runs across the entire façade.

The second storey is in brick again. It has a majestic central window, arched with a projecting molded archivolt supported on a pair of the trademark columns themselves supported on projecting brackets. There are three lights to this window, in an arcade of three arches separated by another pair of columns. Above the arcade is a device in the form of a Celtic cross. The top of the windows's archivolt has an acanthus leaf finial, and below the window is carved a coat-of-arms.

The main window is flanked by a pair of smaller windows with the same eyebrow archivolt as with the aisle windows. The gabled roofline has a cornice with dentillations and modillions large enough to be brackets, and a stone Celtic cross finial is on the apex. Below the cornice is an arcade of fifteen arches with free-standing columns supported on brackets; the central arch under the gable apex is slightly larger than the rest, and contains a mosaic of *St Patrick Ridding Ireland of Snakes*.

Interior

Nave

Immediately inside the entrance, on the left, is an anonymous *Pietà* which shows the entombment of Jesus.

Once through the narthex which is incorporated structurally into the convent building, you are in a nave with aisles and a flat unpainted wooden ceiling. There are four bays, separated by pillars revetted in alabaster, but each bay contains two arcade arches separated by pink granite columns with intricately carved foliage capitals. The floor is of marble, in an appealing design.

The Stations of the Cross are by Alceo Dossena of 1931, and are high-quality sculptures in Carrara marble. They are counted as among his best work.

The triumphal arch of the apse features frescoes of *St Bridget* and *St Columba* on the spandrels.

Sanctuary

The sanctuary is in a large apse with a conch. The apse wall is revetted in pale green marble, with mosaics of SS Patrick, Bridget and Columba now obscured by the new altar. In the conch is a spectacular mosaic by Rodolfo Villani of 1929. It shows St Patrick Converting the High King at Tara, and shows the saint explaining the doctrine of the Trinity with the aid of a shamrock leaf. The text below is a quotation from the saint's writings: *Ut Christiani ita et Romani sitis* ("As you are Christians, so be ye Romans").

Side chapels

In the left hand aisle is an altar dedicated to the Sacred Heart, with an altarpiece depicting The Last Supper by Silvio Galimberti.

In the right hand aisle is the altar of Our Lady. The altarpiece is an old icon of her, brought here from Santa Maria in Posterula after that church was demolished. It is 14th century, painted on slate.

At the ends of the aisles are chapels dedicated to St Bridget and St Oliver Plunkett, with paintings by Leona Rosa of 1938.

Liturgy

This church is now the American national church at Rome.

As from August 2017, the Catholic American community will celebrate the following Masses (in English):

Weekdays 18:00;

Sundays 9:00, 10:30.

Location:

Coord 41° 54' 31" N, 12° 29' 35" E

Address:

31 Via Boncompagni

00187 Roma

Phone:

06 42 03 12 01

External links

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Church web page](#)

[St. Patrick's American Community in Rome web page](#)

[English Wikipedia page](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

["Romeartlover" web-page](#)

[Info.roma web-page](#)