

## San Giacomo alla Lungara



**San Giacomo alla Lungara** is a 17<sup>th</sup> century convent church, north of the Palazzo Corsini in Trastevere. The dedication is to St James the Great. An alternative name is San Giacomo in Settimiana.

### History:

The foundation of this church has been ascribed to Pope Leo IV in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, although its first surviving documentary reference is from 1198 when the church was put under the care of the Chapter of St Peter's by Pope Innocent III. (A lost, slightly earlier epigraph of about 1185 allegedly recorded the gift of a marble pulpit.) The Leonine foundation depends solely on the witness of Panciroli, again allegedly quoting from a lost epigraph.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Via della Lungara did not exist and the church would have served a little

settlement outside the Porta Settimiana and hence not actually part of Trastevere. This hamlet seems to have been called Settignano after the gate, hence the old name of the church. There was a ferry link across the river to water stairs next to the future Sant'Eligio degli Orefici.

The church became conventual in the reign of Pope Innocent IV (1243-54), who gave permission for a monastery of Sylvestrine monks to be founded here. They built the extant bell-tower as part of the new convent. This establishment lasted 250 years before failing, upon which Pope Julius II (1503-13) gave it back to the Chapter of St Peter's. (The Sylvestrines were to found another monastery in Rome at San Stefano del Cacco fifty years later.) The Chapter transferred the complex to the care of the Franciscans of the Third Order Regular in 1620, apparently as a quid pro quo in return for friars performing choral duties at St Peter's. However, the Franciscan Tertiaries did not want it and moved to Santa Maria dei Miracoli.

### Convertite

The Chapter leased it in 1628 to a strictly enclosed Augustinian sisterhood founded for penitential former prostitutes, the Convertite, which had been founded as a Casa Pia at what is now Santa Chiara, and which united with the sisterhood of another Casa Pia at Santa Maria della Scala. (These two establishments had been founded by Pope Pius IV in 1563 for women wishing to "convert to an honest life", with St Charles Borromeo also involved in the original project.)

Cardinal Francesco Barberini, as patron, arranged for a rebuilding of the monastery by Luigi Arrigucci between 1638 and 1643. It is thought that Domenico Castelli was also involved in the project. Arrigucci created the present plan of a single nave with a rectangular apse (the church previously had aisles).

The convent of the sisters was between the church and the river. It was large, and had two cloisters arcaded on all four sides. To the north of the church was the convent entrance, leading into the small rectangular extern cloister. Beyond that, to the east, was the large square main cloister with extensive gardens to the south. These gardens stretched from the street to the river, and were separated from the grounds of the Villa Farnesina to the south by a vicolo or alleyway leading to the ancient ferry landing. Part of this vicolo survives as the Salita del Buon Pastore.

### End of nunnery

The convent was not sequestered in 1873, apparently because the property still belonged to the Chapter of St Peter's. However, the main conventual buildings were demolished in 1887 when the Lungotevere della Farnesina was built. The church was left alone, but it was deconsecrated and allowed to become derelict, so that Armellini writing in 1891 predicted its imminent demolition. Some sisters were still here in 1896, because a charitable hand-out to them in that year is on record.

The survivors must have moved away very soon after this, firstly to the Clivo di Scauro on the Caelian and then, in 1908, to Via Ferruccio 12/A on the Esquiline. In 1913 they decided to disband, so some joined the sisters at Santa Lucia in Selci while others returned to secular life.

### Conventuals

To their credit, the Franciscan Conventuals at Santa Dorotea decided to rescue the church as a dependent place of worship for their parish, and they built a new convent in 1901 on the site of the extern cloister of the sisters. There was a higher population locally than there is now, mostly working class.

The church was restored in 1916, when it was given a new floor and altars. In 1929 a theological college was established here by the Conventuals, but it did not remain long.

The church presently remains in the care of the Franciscan Conventuals, and its future must depend on that order's willingness to keep the convent going. The pastoral justification for keeping the church open hardly exists otherwise nowadays. The Chapter of St Peter's handed over the freehold of the property to the order in 1993.

## **Exterior:**

### Layout and fabric

The church is surrounded by the early 20th century convent buildings, and the only parts of it visible are the façade and campanile.

### Campanile

The church is famous for its 13th century Romanesque campanile, visible from the Lungotevere but not from the Via della Lungara. It stands at the north-west corner of the actual church, and when the new convent was built its premises hugged the tower on two sides.

The tower is in brick, and has three storeys of unequal height separated by projecting cornices incorporating marble modillions (small corbels). The first storey has a single round-headed window on each of the two visible faces, as does the second and the third. The second storey is very tall, with its windows resting on the dividing cornice and an expanse of blank brickwork above. The third storey contains the bells. There is a tiled pyramidal cap. This campanile is unusual among mediaeval Roman campanili in having only one soundhole on each side of its bell-chamber.

The north side of the tower has a fragment of ancient marble column protruding from it just below the cornice between the second and third storeys, and two further fragment of ancient marble flanking the soundhole.

The theory that this campanile was a reconstruction of an earlier tower is now discredited, after a proper survey of the fabric.

### Façade

The dignified Baroque façade, in yellow limestone with architectural details in white marble, is best viewed from down the side street opposite.

The entrance is approached by a double set of transverse stairs, and has a triangular pediment raised above its doorcase. The doorcase itself is decorated with a pair of little volutes on each side, charmingly embellished with a Barberini bee. The pediment impinges on a large framed rectangular aperture which itself encroaches on the entablature of the first storey (this aperture looks as if it should be a window, but seems to have a metal grid and blocking in place of glass). This storey has a high plinth at either side of the stairs, then four rectangular Corinthian pilasters, the inner pair of which is doubletled.

The second storey has four Ionic pilasters framing a window with a pediment broken at the top. There is a crowning entablature with a triangular pediment having a large irregular pentagonal tablet occupying most of it; this looks as if it should have an inscription, but does not.

## **Interior:**

### Layout

The engaging little interior has a single nave on a rectangular plan, with rounded corners. There is a

sanctuary of a single bay entered through a triumphal arch, and two side altars.

### Nave

The nave has three bays of unequal depth, the central one with the side chapels being deeper. This central bay has a high arched niche for the chapels in each side, the archivolt springing from Doric impost. The two shallower bays have a door in each side wall, over which is a round-headed statue niche with a raised frame and a floating curved cornice above.

Only the two further niches have statues, of St Anthony of Padua to the right and St Elizabeth of Hungary (by the look of it) to the left. These derive from the 1916 restoration. The other two niches are empty.

The bays are separated by Composite pilasters supporting an entablature, and in the rounded corners are quadrupletted pilasters in the same style. The flat ceiling does not rest on this entablature, but in between them are two super-friezes embellished with stucco decoration. The ceiling itself is attractively designed with fifteen deep square coffers containing gilded rosettes, the four at the corners being incut to match the corner curves, and painted in white, grey and gold.

The counterfaçade has a large window which interrupts the entablature. Over it is a large archivolt which touches the ceiling; this design feature echoes the triumphal arch.

The polychrome tiled floor in the nave is very attractive. It was laid in 1916, and has a floral motif.

### Sanctuary

The triumphal arch occupies the space between the quadrupletted corner pilasters, and its molded archivolt springs from above the entablature over them. The sanctuary beyond has a single bay, and the far wall has matching curved and quadrupletted pilasters supporting another archivolt over the altar aedicule.

The aedicule has a pair of ribbed black marble Corinthian pilasters supporting a segmental pediment raised on posts. The altarpiece depicting St James is by Francesco Romanelli, and could do with a clean.

### Bernini monument

There is a wall memorial to consistorial advocate Ippolito Merenda by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, which is over a doorway in the sanctuary and is easy to miss. The original location was in the nuns' cloister, but it was rescued when the convent was demolished.

It depicts a flying winged skeleton holding an epitaph, in the form of a crumpled cloth sheet, with its hands and teeth.

This is probably the most overlooked work by Bernini in Rome.

### Side chapels

The side altars have enormous altarpieces, fitted snugly into the arched recesses. To the left is the Annunciation, and to the right the Nativity. The paintings are again very dirty, and difficult to make out.

The shallow barrel vaults of the chapels have monograms, that of Our Lady to the left and that of Christ to the right.

### **Access**

The church is only open for liturgical events.

### **Liturgy**

There is a Mass on Sundays at 8:00 (another Mass at 11:00 seems now to be discontinued).

There also used to be a Mass on weekdays at 7:00, but this was in 2009 and the arrangement might have changed.

### **Location:**

Addr: Via della Lungara 19, Rome

Coord: [41° 53' 41.7"N 12° 27' 57.1"E](#)

### **Links:**

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Nolli map](#) (look for 1216)

["De Alvariis" gallery on Flickr](#)

[Roma SPQR web-page](#) with gallery

[Photo of Bernini sculpture](#)

["Romeartlover" web-page](#)

[Info.roma web-page](#)