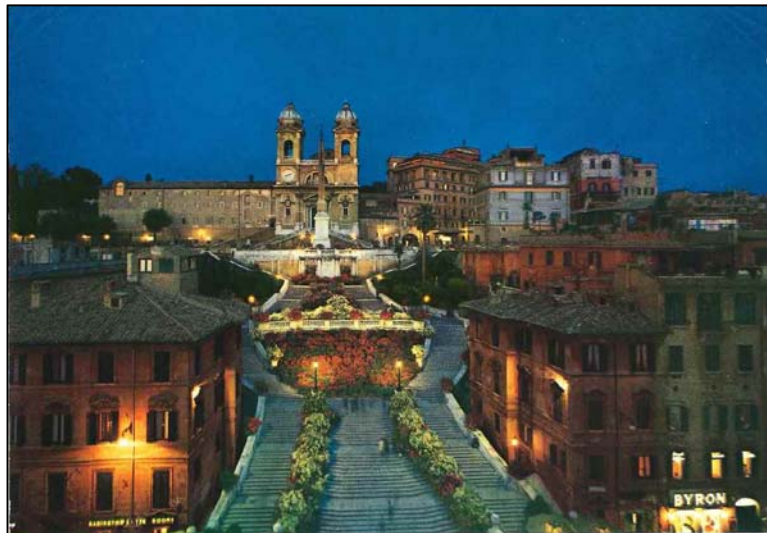


The Landmark Trust

26 PIAZZA DI SPAGNA History Album



**Written by Charlotte Haslam, 1984 & 1994;
Incorporating research by Richard Haslam in 2003
Re-presented in 2015**

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Basic Details

Built: About 1600. Given new façade by the architect of the Spanish Steps, Francesco de Sanctis

Original Architect: not known

Bought by Keats-Shelley Memorial Association: 1906

Flat leased by the Landmark Trust: 1979

Architect for restoration: Enrico Gentiloni Silveri

Builders: Mario Modesti

Work completed: 1982

Architect for restoration work to building exterior in 2002: Roberto Einaudi

Contents

Summary	5
Some Historical Notes	
The run up to building the Steps (taken from C. Elling's <i>Rome</i> 1975)	7
The Brief for the Steps	14
Piazza di Spagna and the 'English Ghetto'	17
Keats' House at 26, Piazza di Spagna	23
Death of John Keats	30
Restoration	35
No. 26 after Keats' death	38
The House in War-time, by Vera Cacciatore	41



Piazza di Spagna

Summary

The Keats-Shelley Memorial Association bought 26 Piazza di Spagna in 1906 to preserve the last lodgings of the poet John Keats who died in 1821. A museum dedicated to the life of the Romantic poets was opened in 1909 in the apartment on the second floor in which Keats had died. Other flats in the building were let. In 1973, however, a law was passed freezing all rents in Rome. This meant that the income from letting flats in the house would, before very long, fail to cover the running costs. Accordingly, in 1977, an appeal was launched to raise money for an endowment which would give the Association a sound and independent financial base.

The Association approached the Manifold Trust, the charity set up by Sir John Smith and which was the main benefactor of the Landmark Trust at that time. Sir John suggested that Landmark take on the Curator's flat on the third floor that was about to become empty. Some renovation was needed before it could be re-let, which the Association could ill afford and so Landmark agreed to lease the flat and to pay for whatever repairs and improvements were necessary to make it a holiday let. Landmark's own annual rent then contributes to the Association's maintenance costs for the building, as well as increasing public access.

No 26 Piazza di Spagna and the building of the Spanish Steps

The building known today as 26 Piazza di Spagna was built around 1600, thus predating the construction of the Steps. It stands at the foot of the Pincio hill and in the later 16th century occupied an important position as a result of Pope Sixtus V's urban planning when new thoroughfares were created and a building boom emerged in this underdeveloped quarter.

From the beginning the area was popular with two types of migrants: artists and tourists. Hotels and inns abounded; many of the tall houses which gradually filled up the gaps in the grid plan of streets from about 1650 were either built as, or quickly became, pensioni, containing sets of apartments to be let out as lodgings. In 1627, Bernini redesigned the stone boat fountain, known as the Barcaccia, in the middle of the piazza.

In the 17th century, the Piazza di Spagna was most obviously the territory of the two countries which owned land around it: the Spanish ambassador to the Vatican ruled over one side from his Palazzo and the French religious order of the Minims held jurisdiction over the other from the Convent of Trinità dei Monti, above the Piazza and so, through them, did the French ambassador. The eventual building of the Steps (1723-6), to a design by Francesco de Sanctis, to link the convent with the square itself was due as much to French ambitions to dominate, as to other more practical and aesthetic considerations. But it was Spain that ultimately won supremacy, giving its name to the square and therefore to the Steps as well; the fact that they were paid for by a Frenchman is usually forgotten. The Romans themselves referred to the Steps simply as La Scalinata. The Steps' triplicate repetitions are in deliberate reference to the Holy Trinity and the convent above.

Francesco de Sanctis redesigned the façades of Nos 25 and 26 at about the same time as the Steps were built, introducing the royal fleur-de-lys of France to the exterior and sunbursts on the plasterwork around the windows facing the Steps, an assertion of French interests. However, inside No.26 the open boarded ceilings with their blue and white rosettes are a survival of the original Roman vernacular house of c.1600 and after.

In the 18th and 19th centuries it was with the English that the Piazza di Spagna was equally often associated; so much so that it was nicknamed the English Ghetto. In the 1740s a famous inn in the Piazza, Lo Scudo di Francia, actually changed its name to La Villa di Londra in the hope of attracting wealthy Grand Tourists (as the Hotel de Londre, it remained one of the best in Rome until it closed in the 1930s). By the 1820s, the English traveller could find the English Church, the Consul and the English bank no more than a few minutes' walk away, while a choice of English doctors and two `English' grocers were in the square itself.

By the early 1700s the two premises at Piazza di Spagna 26 were used as a tailor's and a coffee-shop. The first landlady who can definitely be associated with the house was Signora Angeletti. In 1815 the Rev. Robert Finch took rooms at No 26, for which he paid 19 s a week for 4 elegantly furnished rooms. Signora Angeletti kept in touch with Mr Finch for a short time, and in 1816 informed him that rooms on the second floor were also to let and would suit two friends or a family. It was to this second floor apartment that those two friends, Keats and Severn, came in 1820.

Later tenants included Dr Axel Munthe, the Swedish-born physician and psychiatrist who let the first floor and part of third floor for several years from 1892.

Restoration by the Landmark Trust

Landmark altered very little in the flat, apart from moving the bathroom partition to protect the painted ceiling above it from moisture. Plans were drawn up for this work in 1979 and permission was granted two years later, when work started under the guidance of the architect Enrico Gentiloni Silverj. Other work involved mainly renewing services, relaying floors, repairing windows, improving the kitchen and redecorating. The painted ceilings, which were flaking and stained in places by damp, were carefully restored by a very old and skilful craftsman, who also painted the trompe l'oeil panelling for the dados.

In the hall, some existing hexagonal tiles were relaid, with new cotto floors elsewhere. Finally, the flat was carefully furnished with Italian furniture, but with an eye to English comfort, rather in the manner of an Englishman who has lived all his life in Italy.

More recently, in 2002 the house's exterior was returned to the pale, lime-based colours of 18th -century Rome by the architect Roberto Einaudi.

Some Historical Notes

The run up to building the Steps (taken from C. Elling's *Rome* 1975)

1655 Etienne Gueffier, French chargé d'affaires in Rome, made a will leaving 20,000 scudi to the Minims¹, to go towards building a grand approach to the Church of Trinità dei Monti from the Piazza di Spagna. (The amount was later halved as a compromise with a nephew who disputed the will).

1660 Cardinal Mazarin ordered an agent, Benedetti, to obtain designs from the best architects in Rome; various schemes were submitted including one by Bernini. The centrepiece of the proposed steps was to be an equestrian statue of Louis XIV; not liking this, the Pope rejected the scheme.

1660- 1700 Benedetti pressed the scheme for a few years, but Colbert, France's Minister of Finances under Louis XIV, who would have to pay much of the cost, did not respond. No attempt to revive it was made by the Minims either, who were enjoying Gueffier's growing legacy and applied periodically for a Moratorium on executing the will - though in the 1690s they were busy buying up property on the site.

1700-1720 Pope Clement XI, growing impatient, tried to stir the Minims to action; Gueffier's money would now cover most of the cost, so it would not fall on the French government. In 1717, architects were asked for plans.

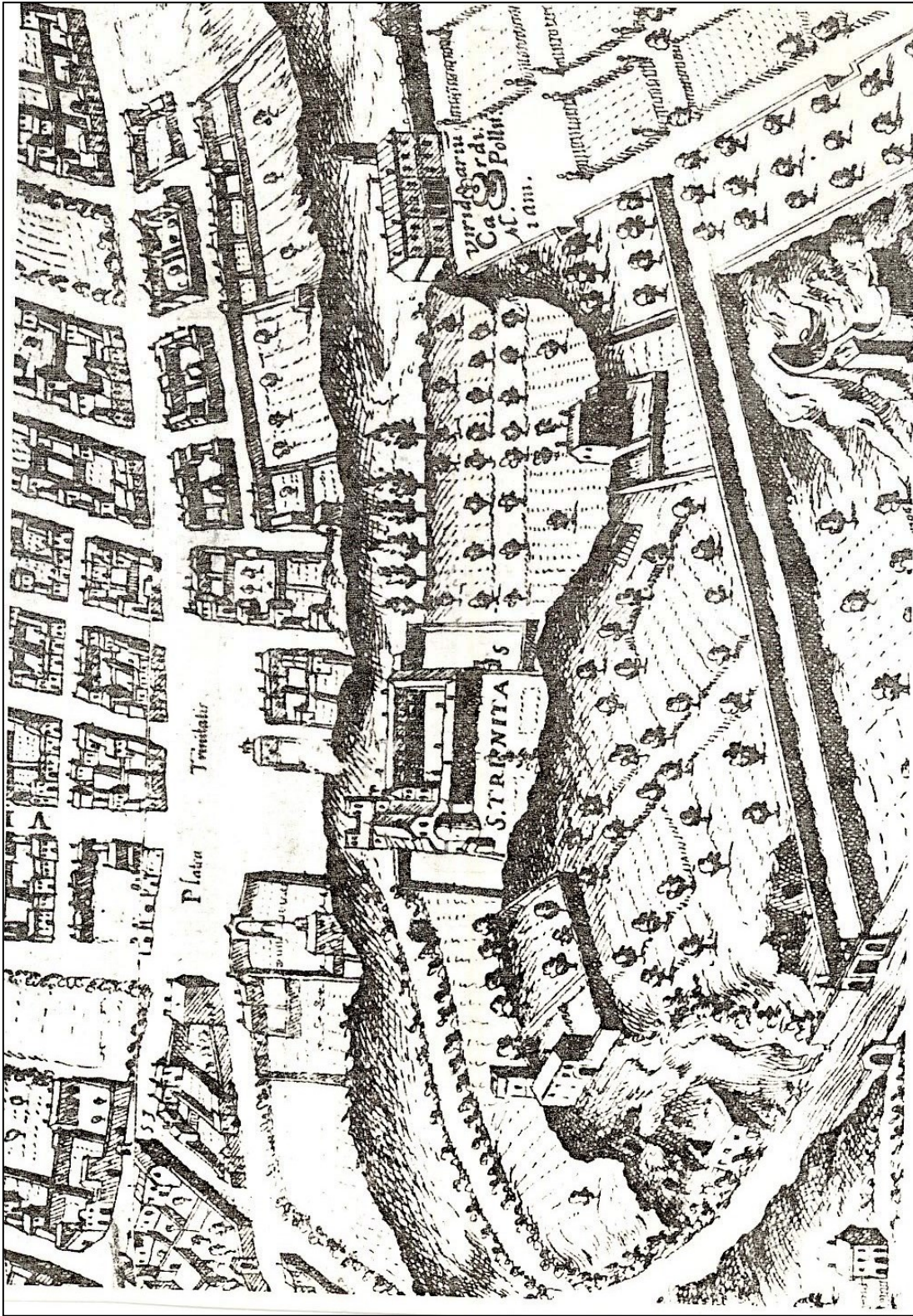
1720 The Minims applied once again for a Moratorium; Clement refused, saying the matter had gone on long enough, Gueffier's capital was now worth 49,000 scudi, the steps must be built. Before he could choose an architect, however, he died.

1721 Innocent XIII took on the task of selecting a design from the many submitted. The leading contenders were Alessandro Specchi, favoured by the Papal Curia, and Francesco de Sanctis, favoured by the Minims. The Pope himself liked elements of both schemes, and also of Bernini's, which was still known about. The French ambassador broke the stalemate by persuading de Sanctis to draw up a final scheme incorporating all these elements.

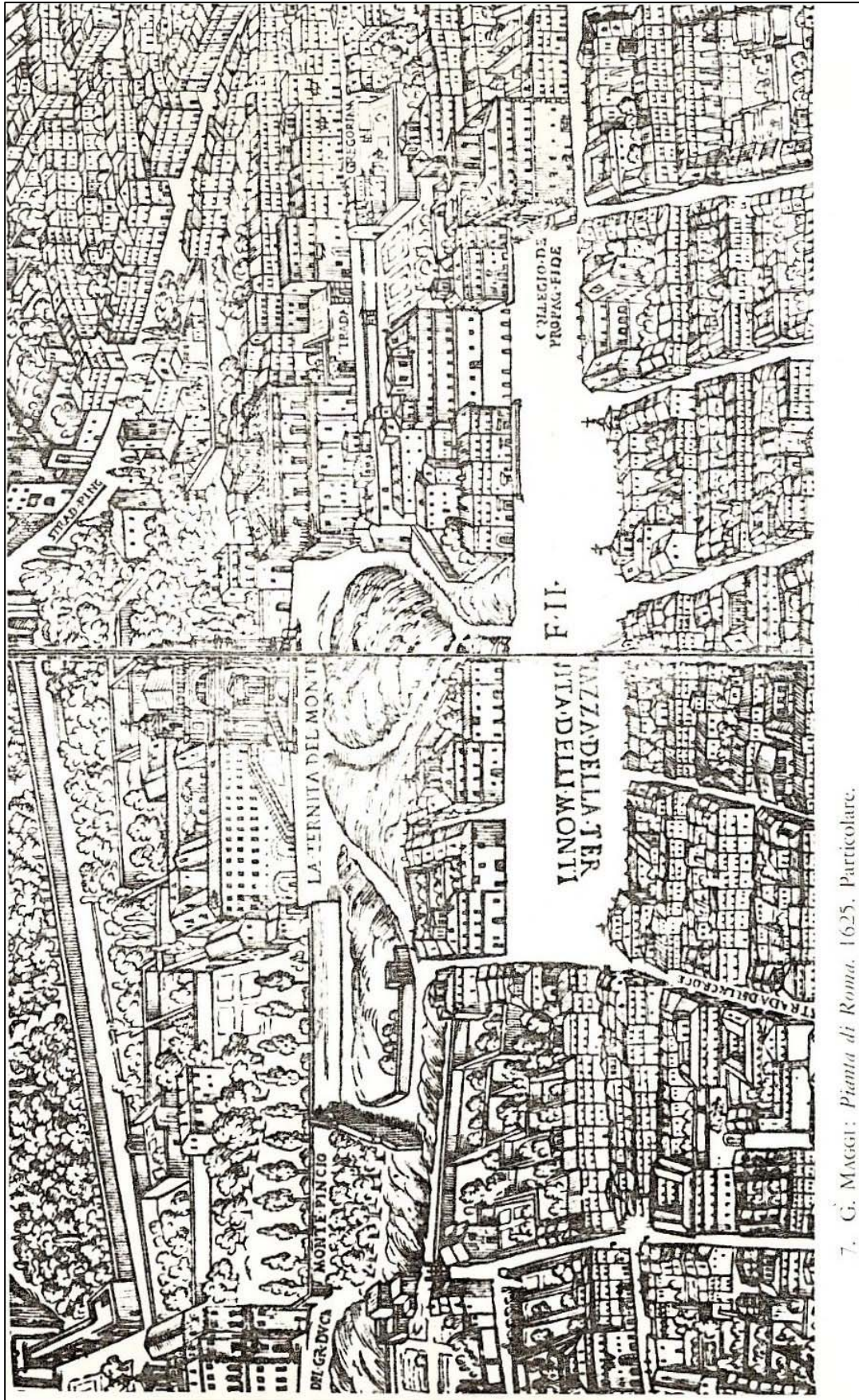
1723 The Pope gave approval to de Sanctis' scheme. Work began immediately, but was not fully completed until 1726, after Innocent XIII's death.

1724-25 Exterior/ facades added to No. 26 by Francesco de Sanctis.

¹ A Roman Catholic religious order originally founded by Saint Francis of Paola in fifteenth-century Italy but which spread to France, Germany and Spain and still in existence today.

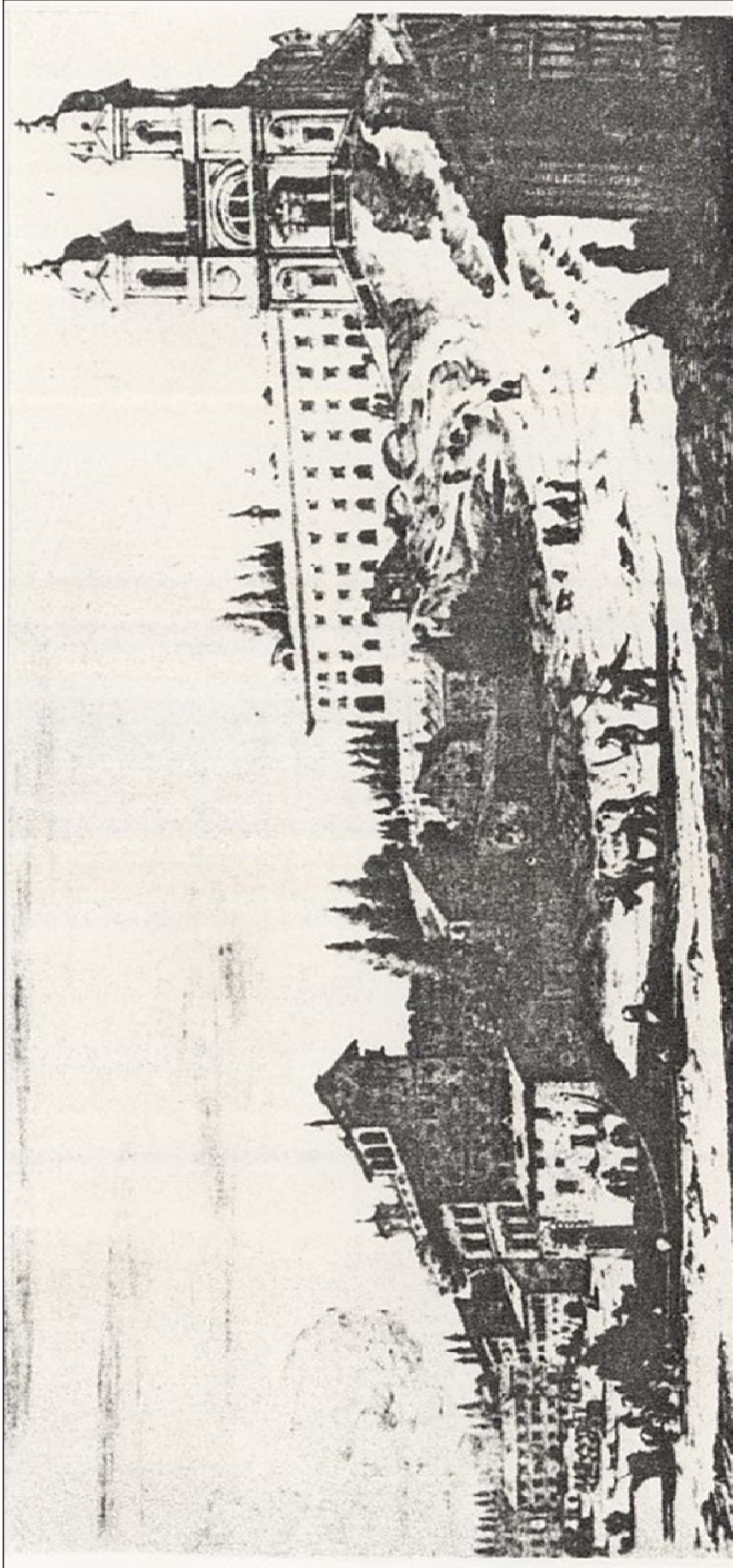


1577 plan of the area around the convent of Trinità dei Monti.



7. G. MAGGI: *Pianta di Roma*, 1625. Particolare.

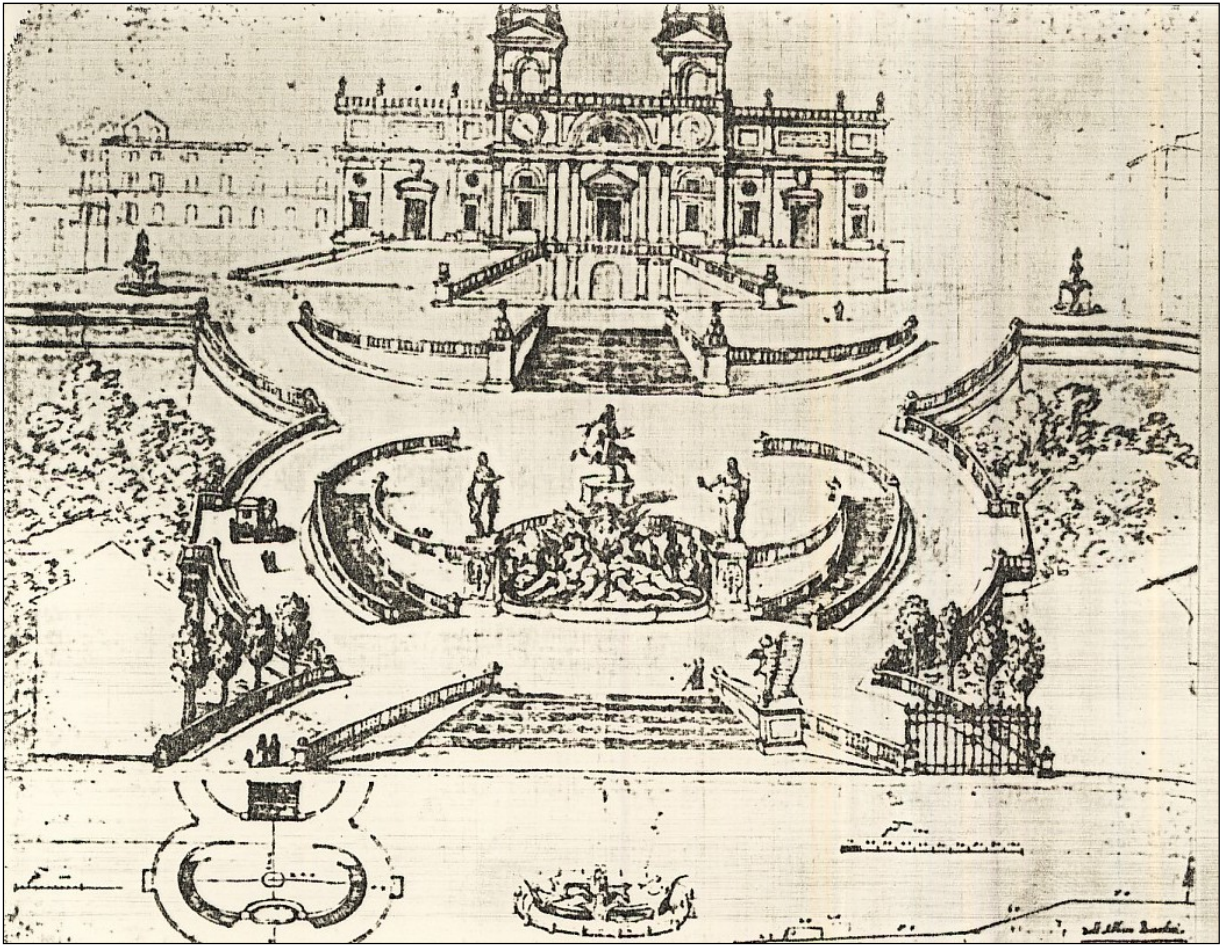
1625 plan of the same area.



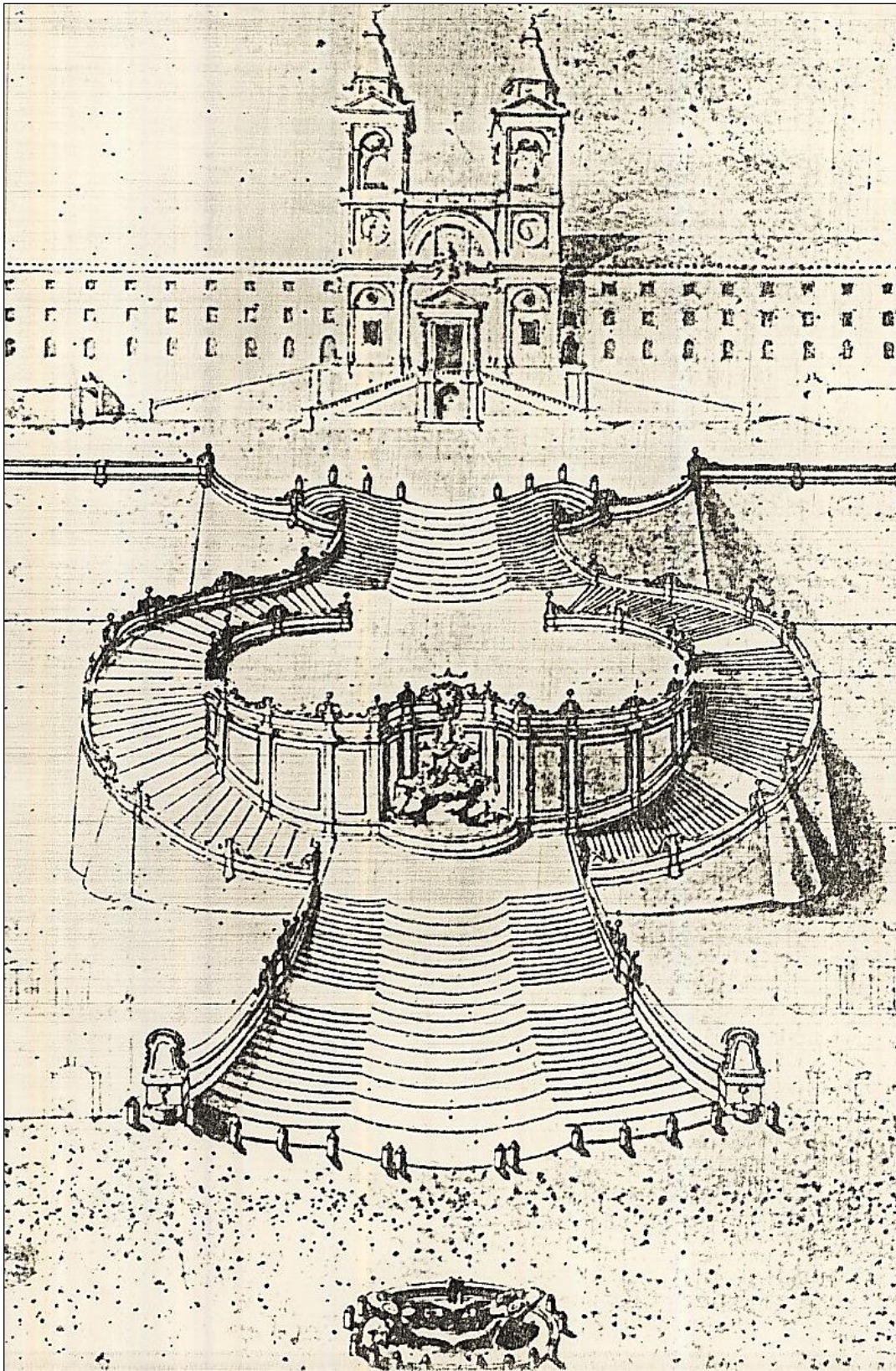
106. Piazza di Spagna and the site of the Spanish Steps. Etching by Israël Silvestre (c. 1640) showing the rough steps leading from the piazza to the Trinità dei Monti.



Piazza di Spagna and the site of the Spanish Steps. Etching by Vincenzo Mariotti recording a display of fireworks ordered by the French ambassador to Pope Innocent XI in 1687 to celebrate the recovery of Louis XIV after a serious illness.



A copy by Benedetti, of Bernini's scheme for the Steps



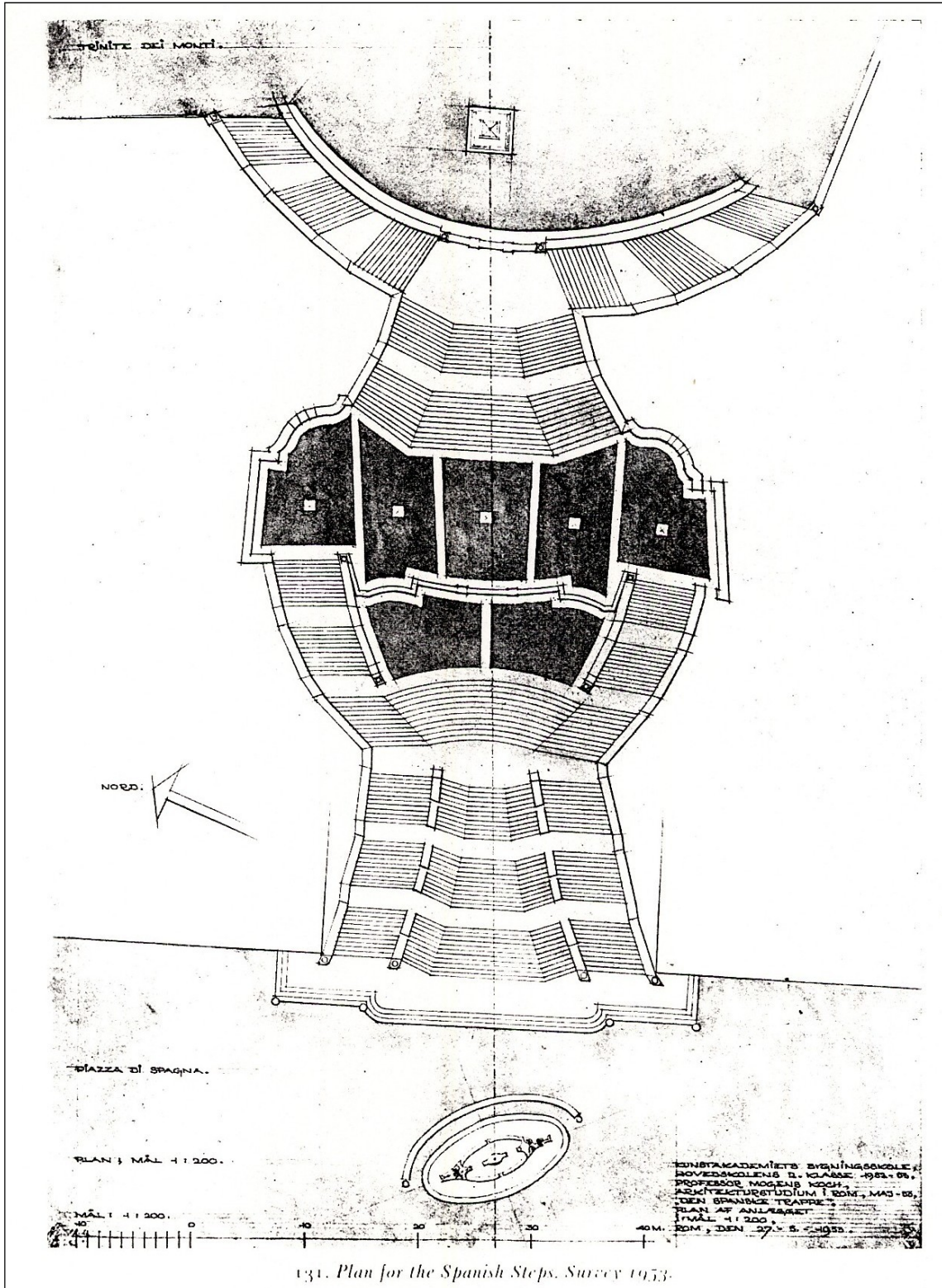
The design for the Steps by Alessandro Specchi.

The Brief for the Steps

This account, by an unknown architect, describes an alternative scheme for the Steps. However, it also reflects the general ideas behind the brief, and the reasons for wanting the Steps to be built. It is probably close to the intentions of de Sanctis himself, who was formerly thought to have been its author as similar references to the Trinity appear in his scheme.

Before forming the idea of this staircase I considered its general conception in terms of the maximum facility and convenience it could offer, and also the fact that it would have to be in full view and open in all its parts, in such a way that anyone beginning to ascend could see freely the whole way up to its top step. This latter aspect was taken into consideration in order to avoid those unpleasant things that could happen there. Indeed the priests of the monastery (Trinità dei Monti) claim to have seen many, many times, even during the day, terrible obscenities on the steps of their own church. And then also there are those incidents that could happen there at night, such as theft and other things. Thus it was necessary to reflect upon the site in which the staircase would be situated. If, for instance, it had been conceived with two ramps, the piazzas in the centre would certainly have been deep and not open to view, considering that the surrounding walls (of the stair ramps) would have blocked the view of them. This would have created opportunities for all those disturbances and unpleasantness mentioned above. Furthermore it was absolutely necessary to form the staircase itself in the centre so that it would always remain in view since it is opposite the Via Condotti; if it were formed in two separated and distinct ramps they would certainly have been lost to view (from Via Condotti) and instead there would remain in view only the deep piazzas between them, which would offer to the eye more deformity and confusion than space.

Then secondly, in dividing and separating this staircase, it has been possible to allude to the title of the church that stands above it. This is accomplished by beginning with three steps and their landing, from which lead up three curved stairs divided by benches, and each of these three stairs is divided into three equal flights, each with thirteen steps. All these flights lead up to a single large stairway at the centre, curved in such a way that it resembles three stairs in one. This stairway then separates into three ramps divided each in three flights, each flight composed of thirteen steps like the others described above. In the centre of this staircase has been formed a noble piazza, raised up, open and in full view with its benches and its obelisk at the centre, an inviting place that will offer utmost repose to the people, and in addition, its generous curve divides and separates the staircase.



The Steps as built, a survey reproduction from 1953, in C. Elling's *Rome*.

Piazza di Spagna in the Seventeenth Century



126. Piazza di Spagna. Painting by unknown artist.

Piazza di Spagna, and the 'English Ghetto'

In the 17th century, the Piazza di Spagna was most obviously the territory of the two countries which owned land around it: the Spanish ambassador to the Vatican ruled over one side from his Palazzo and the French religious order of the Minims held jurisdiction over the other from the Convent of Trinità dei Monti above the Piazza. Through them, the French ambassador also wielded influence. The building of the Steps to link the convent with the square itself was due as much to French ambitions to dominate, as to other more practical and aesthetic considerations. But it was Spain that ultimately won supremacy, by giving its name to the square and therefore to the Steps as well; the fact that they were paid for by a Frenchman is usually forgotten.

At the same time the Romans themselves, ignored both these foreign powers, referring to the Steps simply as La Scalinata. And in the 18th and 19th centuries it was with the English that the Piazza di Spagna was equally often associated; so much so that it was nicknamed the English Ghetto. How did this come about?

The Piazza di Spagna and the streets around it were laid out in the late 16th century by Pope Sixtus V. From the beginning the area was popular with two types of migrants: artists and tourists. Hotels and inns abounded; many of the tall houses which gradually filled up the gaps in the grid plan of streets from about 1650 were either built as, or quickly became, pensioni, containing sets of apartments to be let out as lodgings.

Early prints and plans show this quarter was characterised partly by gardens and low buildings, while taller terraced houses were beginning to form streets; indeed No. 26 was built in the garden of an earlier villa. The ramped paths then leading up to the church filled a break in the row of houses along the east of the piazza, and these were later lined with sheltering trees. In the parish records of Sant'Andrea delle Fratte a spectrum of occupations among the residents is noted, from artist to wood merchant. The decades after 1600 brought a surge of



Drawing by David Allan in the Royal Collection at Windsor. Keats' House and the Steps can be seen on the right, beyond the Villa di Londra, the inn at which the traveller is clearly going to stay. The Caffè degl' Inglese is on the extreme left of the picture.

population and so of urbanism, with houses owned by unnamed landlords at No.26 and the Cybo family at No. 27 accommodating up to twenty or more tenants, on four and five floors respectively. This house on the right of the ascent to the Trinità was arranged from the basement up round a staircase turning in four short flights a floor (instead of the normal two on a dogleg plan), which allowed for several small and independent apartments taking advantage of the windows on three sides. Otherwise its facade is typical of the Late Renaissance town house, with a cellar, workshops and mezzanine below the architrave, and above it two residential storeys with large windows.

The eventual building of the Steps in 1723-6 created a fashionable promenade and meeting place which made the piazza more attractive still. Just after their completion, the Prince de Polignac wrote: 'When the great heat is here everybody prefers to spend the nights out of doors, and this place has become more popular than any other because of its beauty and the clean air.' In the summer of 1734 people danced on the Steps in the moonlight to the music of an orchestra sent over by the Spanish ambassador, and no doubt on other occasions too.

The English were among the most prolific of the many tourists who settled for a longer or shorter time in Rome in pursuit of Art and Antiquity, and were perhaps the most demanding. It was therefore inevitable that some hotels and pensioni in what had become the city's main tourist district should cater especially for them. In the 1740s a famous inn in the Piazza, Lo Scudo di Francia, actually changed its name to La Villa di Londra in the hope of attracting wealthy Grand Tourists (as the Hotel de Londre, it remained one of the best in Rome until it closed in the 1930s. The building then became Barclay's Bank). In 1771 a Mrs Millar recorded her surprise at finding on the menu of the Albergo Pio, 'three or four homely English dishes (thanks to some kind English predecessors who have taught them) such as bacon and cabbage, boiled mutton, bread puddings.'

There soon appeared other amenities to make the English feel at home - or to take advantage of them. Most notorious of these was the Caffè degli' Inglesi at 88, Piazza di Spagna, decorated in the Egyptian style to designs by Piranesi. This was the meeting place of painters (Richard Wilson, Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Jones ...), and also guides and dealers, such as Thomas Jenkins, who acted as agent for many English noblemen wishing to buy works of art and antiques (often fake) and used the Caffè as his headquarters. However, according to Smollett, in 1765, no real gentleman would set foot in such a place, unless he was one of the 'Johnny Raws who posed as dilettanti, were poked and pillaged by aged female singers and were led by the nose by art dealers.' In spite of this, Lord Herbert, in 1779, arranged to meet his acquaintances outside the Caffè.

By 1821, according to Lady Morgan, the Piazza di Spagna and one or two streets off it were 'literally English colonies.' This is borne out by guidebooks, such as Murray's, for a slightly later period, which show that all the comforts, as well as the novelties, which the English traveller expected when abroad could be found there. The English Church, the Consul and the English bank were no more than a few minutes' walk away, while a choice of English doctors and two 'English' grocers were in the square itself. There were also two libraries with reading-rooms where English newspapers and books were available, and of course tea-rooms. Of these, however, the 1856 edition of Murray's guide announced that the Piazza's Caffè Nazzari, until then highly recommended, was no longer the best in Rome, since smoking had been allowed in the adjoining restaurant.

Artist's materials (or, for the lazy, photographs) could be bought at Flacheron-Hayard's Colour Shop, models in picturesque costume would pose on the Steps, and several instructors both of drawing and music lived in the Piazza. Shops on every side offered antiquities (both genuine and reproduction), prints and engravings, mosaics, cameos, jewellery and anything else that could be taken away as a souvenir.

Although the Piazza contained two excellent hotels, the Londra and the Europa, the English for the most part stayed in the greater privacy of lodgings, either in a pensione or in part of a private house. They were on a generous scale; Mrs Millar in 1771 noted that the pensione opposite the inn where she stayed offered at a fairly standard price an apartment of five rooms, hung with damask, as well as a kitchen and a servant's room. Murray's guide and Baedeker however, both advised strongly against having anything to do with the 'disreputable characters who are constantly hanging about ... offering lodgings for hire.' If no personal recommendation was available, it was essential to go to a respectable house-agent such as Mr Shea's at 11, Piazza di Spagna, who could at the same time arrange anything else, from the hire of a carriage to the shipping home of those more bulky purchases that might tempt a gentleman of taste.



FONTANA NELLA PIAZZA DELLA TRINITÀ DE MONTI.
nel Rione di Campo Marzio, Architeto del Cav. Gio. Lorenzo Bernini.

The Barcaccia. Engraving by Falda showing the Piazza di Spagna before the building of the Spanish Steps. The stone boat fountain, placed askew as though afloat on a pool, fed by the Acqua Vergine, was redesigned in 1627 by the sculptor Pietro Bernini, perhaps in collaboration with his famous son Gian Lorenzo who was later involved with the early stages of the great stairway project. The houses around this teeming space have long histories closely engaged in the life of Rome, as current research is starting to reveal. By virtue of being little altered No. 26, one of those nearest the Barcaccia, has acquired some significance in its own right.

Keats' House at 26, Piazza di Spagna

The building known today as 26 Piazza di Spagna was built around 1600, thus predating the construction of the Steps. Indeed it would be hard to imagine a better place to tell a story of Roman life than 26 Piazza di Spagna. Situated at the foot of the Pincio hill, one of the most desirable sites for the villas of noble families, the house looks west towards the Tiber, east up the slope and, unusually, also along it to the north. In the Ancient Romans' times the river's flood plain was several metres lower than now, and the space by the hill was one of the pools used for their *Naumachia* or water-fights. Much later, as the ground level rose, so did the floor of the vaulted cellars below the house.

The house's context in the city landscape becomes clearer in the later 16th century, when part of Pope Sixtus V's planning, the long axis from Porta del Popolo (the main entrance for all travellers coming from the north into Rome) along Via del Babuino and Via Due Macelli, became instrumental in settling people in this underdeveloped quarter. The elongated butterfly plan of the two parts of the piazza seems to have resulted from the intersection of this major axis with the secondary one on which No. 26 stands. Its southern half became known as Piazza di Spagna after the remodelling of No. 57 as the Spanish embassy to the Holy See, after 1647. Its northern half was Piazza della Trinità, named after the church of the Most Holy Trinity, sited above it next to the monastery founded in 1494 by King Charles VIII of France.

No. 26 stands at the narrowest point of this plan, at its east but also on the south side of another major axis. This is set up by Via dei Condotti which overlies the conduits of the Acqua Vergine, and the streets continuing westwards; and by its termination at the higher level by the facade of the church of the Trinità', dated 1570.²

² *KSMA centenary book 2003*



Rossi's engraving of 1726, dedicated by de Sanctis to the King of France, showing the two houses, now refaced complete, on either side. In 1724, the Minim fathers had acquired the old house on the right of the Steps from Domenico Antonio Belloni, largely so that the rents it earned might pay for their maintenance, as well as the property on the left belonging to Madame Petit.

By the 1690s, the plans for building a flight of steps from the Piazza di Spagna to the church of Trinità dei Monti were already long-standing. In anticipation of the fact that they would one day have to be realised, the Order of the Minims now set about buying the properties at the foot of the hill, on either side of the existing approach. The Minims' intention was to redevelop these sites, on which older houses stood, to provide an income for themselves, and no doubt to establish a French presence directly on the square as well.

These new houses, although they do not appear in his original drawings, were certainly designed by Francesco de Sanctis at about the same time as the Steps. They appear complete in Rossi's engraving of 1726, dedicated by de Sanctis to the King of France - and to emphasise their ownership the houses were decorated with the emblems of France.

De Sanctis must have been fully willing to go along with the Minims' plan; as Luigi Salerno says in his book on the Piazza di Spagna, the two `palazetti' act as wings to the theatrical scenery of the steps themselves, framing the whole prospect and also serving as a foil to it. The two houses, proposed to frame the base of the Scalinata like the permanent stage architecture of ancient and Renaissance theatres, are now dissimilar twins. The concept became represented as a symmetry in the work of the many designers concerned for half a century in its evolution, emerging as a pair of two-bay towers, strangely, the existing realisation, has by time and use introduced English culture into this portal of a Roman work of art paid for by the French.

Francesco de Sanctis's project for the house on the left, to be built from new in a garden, was recorded as identical with No. 26 in Girolamo Rossi's print of 1726. Enlarged in the mid-19th century by incorporating the next house, it became a small palazzo of five bays with the central doorway bay projecting slightly. Its apartments are thus larger than those in the right-hand house, but both have rooms on the east subtly set forward so that these two side facades

act like stage scenery, to guide the eye and follow the narrowing of the Scalinata before its first main landing. This in turn lets windows looking towards the facade of the Trinità frame that stupendous composition. On the piazza the Scalinata's lowest three steps and ornamental piers, of travertine stone like the doorways and workshop arches of the two Trinità houses, extend laterally to assert the part played by the first two bays of the piazza buildings either way, in the social functioning of the stairs as well as their ownership.

A question arises regarding the intended size of the older right-hand house when it received its new facades in 1724-25. The small marble tablet at mezzanine level on the piazza front records the property boundary between the two owners (the Minims, and the Cybo and Stefanoni families). The notaries' deeds make clear how the new pilaster strip overlaps the front wall of No.27, but there is no way of telling whether the facade architecture on the very satisfactory two-bay tower was considered capable of extension across the three bays of No. 27 (which in the event did not change hands).

In their details this pair of facades introduces a French inflection at the end of the Baroque in Rome: a moment of Rococo before Roman style took its early turn towards NeoClassicism. Just as De Sanctis, on the Minims' commission, drew a little on Alessandro Specchi's more refined designs for the Scalinata, so he also may have learned from the decorative stucchi in the Salle de la Congregation Generale at Palazzo San Luigi. The royal fleur-de-lys of France also appears on the exterior of that palazzo, as well as on Piazza di Spagna 25, 26 and 9 which shortly followed it. While Papal and family arms are part of the emblematic language of Roman architecture, these and the sunbursts on the otherwise modest plasterwork round the windows on the piazza and Scalinata facades convey an assertion of French interests. Inside No.26 however, the open boarded ceilings with their blue and white rosettes, surviving in rooms on both main floors, belong to the original Roman vernacular house of c.1600 and after.

Inhabitants of 26 Piazza di Spagna

Both houses contained sets of comfortable apartments, for which the Minims could expect high rents from wealthy and noble visitors to Rome, eager to establish themselves at a fashionable address. So from the beginning, 26, Piazza di Spagna has been largely inhabited by foreigners, although no doubt from time to time Roman families made their home there as well.

By the early 1700s the two premises at Piazza di Spagna 26 were used as a tailor's and a coffee-shop. The tailor at no. 26 was Flemish and lived in one of six households which also included an old Maestro di Cappella, Saverio de Luca, and the cafetario, Gaetano Oliva. Gaetano and his family ran their coffee-shop for over thirty years; he styled himself *cioccolatiere* in the early 1730s and named his premises the 'Cafe' della Trinità de Monti' in 1738. With his wife Apollonia Tinozzi he raised a family on the first floor; they, with a succession of young waiters and cousins to help, were by far the longest residents in the house, both before and after its rebuilding.

The historian Christian Elling identifies the house in the mid-18th century with a famous lodging house, 'La Scalinata', run by a Signora Peti. To this, Charles de Broesses moved after being 'fleeced' at another inn, and he found it far preferable, everything being provided except the bed-curtains. Later, in 1789, Cagliostro stayed in the same place. However it is possible that Elling has confused the pensione with the Trattoria della Scalinata which occupied the ground floors of Nos. 26 and 27 in the 19th century, appearing in an engraving of 1841, but which had nothing to do with the upper floors.

A Madama Stuarda is also said to have let rooms in a house next to the steps in the 1770s, but which side of them is not recorded. The first landlady who can definitely be associated with the house is in fact Keats' Signora Angeletti, but in an earlier appearance which is also the first record of an Englishman staying in the building.

By the 1790s the coffee shop was still being run at No. 26 by Giovanni Battista Bartolinati, and the adjacent space was a billiard room; but with the general dissolution caused by the French Revolution the house passed from the hands of the Fathers of the Trinità. When the Grand Tour picked up again for the English after 1815, they arrived in still greater numbers; and there is more to be learned about them in all periods. The tenants on the first floor of No. 26 were Alessandro Angeletti, a Roman etcher of plates for prints, and his family; the upper floors were already operating as boarding accommodation. After Angeletti died in 1820 his Venetian wife Anna Cafurri stayed on for four years, with her married daughter Verginia upstairs, but they were the only permanent residents.

In 1815 the Rev. Robert Finch took rooms at No 26 on the recommendation of the Signora Angeletti's uncle, a dealer in books and engravings. He was delighted, and wrote the following description of his stay:

'I pay 19s a week for four rooms elegantly furnished. The neatness which distinguishes everything about the Signora is truly charming, and rare in this country. Her husband has been some years in Portugal, and has quite neglected her. She is a lively, smart, handsome little woman, and has two nice daughters, who scarcely appear younger than their mother. She has much taste for the fine arts, and draws and engraves.'

'I shall adopt the plan of breakfasting at home which is convenient, as a flock of goats comes to the steps of my door every morning. Cows traverse the city also to give milk. My apartments are like a small house, there being no communication, so that I am quite independent and perfectly quiet.'

'The majority of shops in the piazza belong to the print-sellers, and Artists in Mosaic and Pietre Dure ... Most foreigners take up their residence in furnished lodgings, which abound here, and are generally let from 20-70 piastres a month.'

After his departure he recommended his landlady to many of his friends, one of whom wrote lyrically of the 'festoons of Roses and Carpeted floors of the house in the Piazza di Spagna.' Signora Angeletti kept in touch with Mr Finch for a short time, and in 1816 informed him that rooms on the second floor were also to let

and would suit two friends or a family. It was to this second floor apartment that those two friends, Keats and Severn, came in 1820.

By 1826 the whole of Nos. 25 and 26 were let to foreign visitors, in common with much of the rest of the piazza. The former became the premises of Babington's Tea Rooms, English ways causing much excitement to Gabriele d'Annunzio's generation; both were painted ox-blood red, the colour still on the former and which gave the latter its 19th-century nickname, the Casina Rossa. The ground floors of Nos. 26 and 27 worked together at one point as the Trattoria della Scalinata.

Towards the end of the 19th century, pressure on space in Piazza di Spagna, during the tide of building in Rome which followed the absorption of the Papal State into a unified Italy, led to most of its surrounding houses being raised by two or even three storeys (though this did not happen at No. 27 until 1938).

The later history of the house, the tenancy of the Swedish physician and writer Axel Munthe (which included part of the third floor, now this flat), and its saving by the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association under threat of demolition and redevelopment of the site as a large hotel in 1904, is told in Sir Joseph Cheyne's notes which follow, and in the literature of the Museum. Other landlords and other tenants, many of them no doubt English, came to a happy arrangement over the renting of rooms here throughout the 19th century, as they had in the 18th. Those who stay here now, therefore, belong to a long succession of tourists in Italy, with all of whom they share the same vivid and sometimes spectacular view from the windows.

Charlotte Haslam

December 1984, updated in 1994 and 2015 incorporating further research by Richard Haslam, in 2003.

Death of John Keats

During 1820 Keats became increasingly debilitated by his tuberculosis. In September, he agreed to leave Hampstead and move to Italy with his friend Joseph Severn at the suggestion of his doctors. On 13 September, they left for Gravesend and four days later boarded a sailing brig, where he made the final revisions of 'Bright Star', a poem to his fiancée Fanny Brawne who lived next door in Hampstead. The journey was arduous: Keats and Severn suffered storms, followed by a dead calm that delayed the ship's passage. When they finally docked in Naples, the ship was held in quarantine for ten days due to a suspected outbreak of cholera in Britain. By the time Keats reached Rome on 14 November, the warmer climate he was seeking had disappeared for the winter. He and Severn took up lodgings in No 29 Piazza di Spagna, on the second floor.

Keats's House in Rome

Keats wrote his last letter on 30 November 1820 to his friend Charles Armitage Brown with whom he had lodge in Hampstead. "Tis the most difficult thing in the world to me to write a letter. My stomach continues so bad, that I feel it worse on opening any book – yet I am much better than I was in Quarantine. Then I am afraid to encounter the proing and conning of any thing interesting to me in England. I have an habitual feeling of my real life having past, and that I am leading a posthumous existence"

Despite care from Severn and Dr. James Clark, Keats' health rapidly deteriorated, although the medical attention of the day that he received may have hastened his death. Even so late in the day, Dr Clark declared that the source of his illness was 'mental exertion' and that the source of his illness was chiefly in his stomach. Clark eventually diagnosed consumption (tuberculosis) and placed Keats on a starvation diet of an anchovy and a piece of bread a day intended to reduce the blood flow to his stomach. He also bled his patient, which must also have contributed to Keats's weakness. Small doses of opium were a typical pain relief

measure, and Keats had asked Severn to buy a bottle of opium when they were setting off on their voyage. What Severn didn't realise was that Keats saw it as a possible means of committing suicide. Keats tried to get the bottle from Severn on the voyage but Severn refused him, and again in Rome, when the doctor took it away. Ridden with pain, Keats was angry with both Severn and Clark that they would not give him laudanum (opium), demanding 'how long is this posthumous existence of mine to go on?'

The early months of 1821 saw a slow and steady decline into the final stages of tuberculosis. Severn nursed him devotedly and observed in a letter how Keats would sometimes cry upon waking to find himself still alive. On 23 February 1821, the end came. Severn wrote, 'Keats raves until I am in a complete tremble for him...about four, the approaches of death came on. [Keats said] "Severn—I—lift me up—I am dying—I shall die easy; don't be frightened—be firm, and thank God it has come." I lifted him up in my arms. The phlegm seem'd boiling in his throat, and increased until eleven, when he gradually sank into death, so quiet, that I still thought he slept.'



Joseph Severn's drawing of his friend John Keats on his death bed.

Sadly, Keats died unaware of the acclaim that his work would attract, believing himself a failure as a poet. He was buried in the Protestant Cemetery, Rome, requesting a tombstone that bears no name or date, only the words, 'Here lies One whose Name was writ in Water.' Severn and Brown erected the stone, which under a relief of a lyre with broken strings, has as epitaph:

This Grave
contains all that was Mortal
of a
Young English Poet
Who
on his Death Bed, in the Bitterness of his Heart
at the Malicious Power of his Enemies
Desired
these Words to be
engraven on his Tomb Stone:
Here lies One
Whose Name was writ in Water.
24 February 1821

The text echoes Catullus LXX: 'Sed mulier cupido quod dicit amanti / in vento et rapida scribere oportet aqua' (What a woman says to a lover lover / should be written in the wind and the running water). Severn and Brown added their lines to the stone in protest at the critical reception of Keats's work, even blaming his death on the Quarterly Review's scathing attack of "Endymion".

Seven weeks after the funeral the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley memorialised Keats in his poem *Adonais*. James Clark saw had daisies planted on the grave, saying that Keats would have wished it. For public health reasons, the Italian authorities burned the furniture in Keats's room, scraped the walls, and made new windows, doors and flooring. Shelley became one of Keats's most fervent champions, but died himself the following year, drowning in the Gulf of Spezia when his boat was caught in a sudden storm. His ashes too are buried in the Protestant Cemetery, and Joseph Severn is buried next to Keats.



107. *The Spanish Steps. Etching by J. L. Le Geay from the Varie Vedute di Roma of 1748. In the foreground is the Barcaccia.*



After 1786



Piazza di Spagna in 1935

Restoration by Landmark

After Landmark acquired the lease to the flat, plans were drawn up in early 1979 but went no further for two years, during which time they disappeared into the intricate workings of the Roman planning system. The main problem was the proposal to move the bathroom partition, because of concern for the painted ceiling above it. Permission was eventually given, however, and work started under the architect Enrico Gentiloni Silverj. Apart from the alteration to the bathroom, this consisted mainly of renewing services, relaying floors, repairing windows, improving the kitchen and redecorating.

Little was done to alter the original appearance of the flat, contrary to the suspicions of Roman neighbours, who repeatedly alerted the police to dreadful things happening in the 'Casa Rossa', prompting them to call to 'repress irregularities.' The painted ceilings, which were flaking and stained in places by damp, were carefully restored by a very old and skilful craftsman, who also painted the trompe l'oeil panelling for the dados.

In the hall, some existing hexagonal tiles were relaid, with new cotto floors elsewhere. Finally, the flat was carefully furnished with Italian furniture, but with an eye to English comfort, rather in the manner of an Englishman who has lived all his life in Italy.

More recently, in 2002 the house's exterior was returned to the pale, lime-based colours of 18th -century Rome by the architect Roberto Einaudi.



Restoration of the painted ceiling in 1981.





No. 26 Piazza di Spagna during restoration in March 2002. The advertising revenue largely paid for the work to the house.

No. 26 after Keats' death

By 1870, the house was part of the patrimony of a Roman family, the Marchesi Silvestrelli. There were two brothers, Augusto and Cesare (a monk) and their nephew, Giulio.

In 1873, Cesare was paid in cash for his share of the property and the owners were reduced to Augusto and Giulio. In 1875, Giulio became the owner and later, in the same year, transferred this house and another in Borgo Vecchio, as a dowry, to his sister Teresa, who had married the Neapolitan Marchese Lodovico Santasilia.

It would seem from the contemporary documents that Teresa Silvestrelli had been born in the house, although none of the family was resident there in 1875.

In 1898, the Marchese Santasilia ceded part of the rents from the House to a Contessa Maria d'Argyropoulo, widow of a certain Roberto Bazzichelli, for three years, evidently in exchange for a loan.

Although there is a photograph of Munthe's dog-cart in front of the House and a sign 'Camere' (Rooms to Let) clearly displayed, the House would appear to have been let as flats at that date as follows:-

Ground floor tenants

(lease dating from 1897) Carlo Petersien and Augusto Rantemberg

First floor and part of third floor tenant

(lease dating from 1892) Dr. Axel Munthe

Second floor Giovanni Carpisassi

(lease dating from 1896)

This agreement was renewed in 1901 for a further three years. The tenants, however, changed as follows:-

Ground floor Carlo Petersien
(from 1899)

First floor Dr. Walter Erhardt
(from October 1901)

Second Floor Luigi Corbucci
(from September 1901)

Third Floor Pierre de Metivier
(from 1901)

There were several other mortgages on the property which were paid off when the property was sold to Carlo Sarocchi in 1904 for 61,000 Lire. Carol Sarocchi sold the house in December 1906 to the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association for 100,000 Lire.

It would seem from these documents that Axel Munthe occupied the first and part of the third floors (not the Museum) from 1892 to 1901. There are no documents in the House to show whether he came to Piazza di Spagna 26 earlier than 1892.

Munthe was a physician to the Swedish royal family and a lifelong Italophile. He famously renovated, and later wrote about, the Villa San Michele on Capri. It was to raise funds for this that he came to Rome in 1890, catering to foreign dignitaries as well as locals. From 1898, Munthe also had an affair with English socialite Lady Ottoline Morrell.

Extract from a letter written in 1984 by Sir Joseph Cheyne, Curator

It is interesting to note from early prints that the house on the opposite side of the steps had the same facade as the Keats House, with only two lines of decorated windows, thus forming two columns as it were enclosing the steps. This facade was altered, some time after Keats' stay in this house, to provide five lines of decorated windows with a bogus XVIIIth Century doorway, thus ruining De Sanctis' perspective for the steps.

I have reason to believe that our flat was let as a flat after the House was bought by the K.S.M.A.... A plan was afoot, I believe, to turn the whole block, from the steps to Piazza Mignanelli, into a hotel, either by reconstructing the existing buildings or knocking them all down and rebuilding them. A small early XVIIIth Century house, similar to ours, on the angle of Via Condotti and Piazza di Spagna, suffered a similar fate at the hands of the family of Ettore Roeslar Franz, the watercolourist whose paintings of 'Rome of Yesteryear' are to be seen in every print shop and calender. The Roeslar Franz at the turn of the century was Hon. British Consul, as far as I can ascertain! The building now houses, among its illustrious offices, the British Embassy to the Holy See.

The House in War-time, by Vera Cacciatore³

THE HOUSE IN WAR-TIME

by Vera Cacciatore

IN THE SUMMER of 1940 the position of the Keats-Shelley Memorial was indeed an uncertain one. The English members of the Committee had had to leave and the American secretary, Mr. Hale P. Benton, foreseeing the course of international relations, invited a 'neutral' citizen, Dr. Erik Sjöqvist, Director of the Swedish Institute, to join as Honorary Treasurer. At the same time, with a view to such problems of administration as might arise in war-time, the Italian Lawyer Luigi Betts was appointed Legal Adviser. Others, too, in due course, were specially enrolled—M. Micheli of the Swiss Legation, M. De Maillardoz (another Swiss citizen), M. Mohn of the Swedish Legation, and Don Filippo Caffarelli, an Italian.

It was in December 1941 that, on the breakdown of relations with America, Keats House entered upon its 'underground' period, assuming an anonymous obscurity even in its outward appearance. The placques marking the museum were removed and, like so many thousands of people in Italy, it was glad enough to lose its identity card and to become, as it had been in those old years before the Poet passed, a mere feature of the architecture of the scalinata.

Those few visitors who succeeded in reaching the second storey found no welcome and no reply at the unmarked door: it was as if in a period between two tenancies the old tenant had departed for a destination unknown. And indeed there *had* been a departure. Though the celebrated library of more than 10,000 books remained in its place two little boxes, on December 14th 1942, were sent to the Abbey of Montecassino: their contents—of which an inventory was made and signed in the room of Joseph Severn—by Dr. Sjöqvist, Don Filippo Caffarelli, Signor Luigi Betts and Signora Cacciatore—included the famous last drawing of Keats made by the hand of Severn here in this house in Piazza di Spagna, two first editions of Keats (the *Endymion* of 1818 and the *Lamia* volume of 1820), Keats' own drawing of a Grecian urn, locks of Keats' and Shelley's hair, and holograph letters of Shelley, Byron, Leigh Hunt, Trelawny, Mary Shelley and the Brownings. The boxes were sealed but left without labels on their outer coverings. This it was, ultimately, which saved them from German inspection.

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³ Keats-Shelley Memorial Association Bulletin

Montecassino, an ancient monastery on a hill, far away from aerial targets, was then considered one of the safest places in Italy: even the National Museum of Naples had chosen to send its famous collection of bronzes there. Then came the Allied landings and the Anglo-American advance. Cassino became the centre of German resistance and of the bitter struggles of the ensuing months. On October 14th, 1943 Col. Schlegel and Capt. Becker, a medical officer, both of the Goering division, reached the Abbey: the battle was about to reach its climax and evacuation had been ordered. A few days afterwards the Goering division removed the archives, which were Italian state property, to Spoleto, and took to Rome the contents of the Biblioteca Paolina, the property of the monastery. These removals were preceded by a thorough inspection of the archive room. The archivist, however, by dint of great skill and courage, contrived to keep the German officials away from the secret cupboard in which were hidden the treasures entrusted to him by the Keats-Shelley Memorial and these, at the earliest opportunity, he removed to his own cell where he had them put into a crate with his books and personal effects. On the morning of October 30th a lorry and a car left Montecassino for Rome: in the car, driven by Capt. Becker was Don Mauro Inguanez. The archivist and his baggage were put down at the convent of St. Anselm on the Aventine. Thither on 30th November went the Curator in a car to recover the precious boxes which, once again, were duly placed in their proper home in Piazza di Spagna.

Around the house, meanwhile, poured columns of armoured cars, artillery, ambulances and tanks moving, at first, southwards, and, later, in the direction of the bridgehead at Anzio. At night German patrols went round the Piazza and sailors of the Kriegsmarine would pass, singing musically, and either turning round the Bernini fountain to enter the Via dei Condotti or descending the steps of Santa Trinità dei Monti on their way home to their billets in the central hotels that had been requisitioned for them. It was known that the Chief of the Rome Gestapo, Col. Dollmann, lived in the Pensione Trinità dei Monti at the juncture of Piazza di Spagna with Via S. Sebastianello. At night the long black cars of the Gestapo would stop in front of what is now Barclays Bank and sometimes, during the interminable hours of curfew, would be heard that familiar, sinister knocking at doors which portended a visit of the military police. In every house there was something or somebody to hide—an organiser of the underground movement, an escaping Allied prisoner, a clandestine printing press, a museum no less clandestine. A new highway, The Roofway, was discovered, and proved in the hours of darkness to be the salvation of not a few.

THE HOUSE IN WAR-TIME

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One morning a column of German cars stopped before the Palazzo Zuccari, then the home of the Biblioteca Herziana di Storia d'Arte. The books had already been crated and from Keats' house we saw them starting on their northward journey—to Salzburg, as it proved, where they were subsequently recovered by the Allies. In Paris a like fate had befallen the Bibliothèque Turgenev. These were the days of our greatest anxiety for German officers were growing more and more insistent in their demands to visit the museum. But they received the unvarying reply that everything had been removed at the beginning of the war and the keys handed to the Direzione delle Belle Arti. This was a successful way of side-tracking enquiries since by now all the offices of the Italian government had been removed to Northern Italy and, with the incessant air-raids, civil communications had become both erratic and precarious.

When on June 4th 1944 the allied troops entered Rome the soldiers who flooded across Piazza di Spagna can have had no time to recognize the house made famous by the passage of one of the greatest of their fellow-countrymen. But next morning Mr. A. C. Sedgwick, of the *New York Times*, who well remembered from the days of peace what that little house held for the English speaking peoples, came up to ask if anything had been lost during the German occupation and the shifting tides of war. He learned that everything was in order.

So the House was at once reopened and the boxes of manuscripts unsealed in the presence of the British and American Ambassadors and the representatives of the Press. Deserted as never before during the previous four or five years, it was now crowded as never before by soldiers from every continent who came to reflect, to recover themselves and to find a little corner of England; during that long winter, especially, when the Gothic line remained fixed across the mountains of Tuscany and Emilia the officers and men on their seven-day leaves were glad enough to come from their noisy, crowded clubs to seek in Keats' house a haven of rest and comfort. And from the verse and letters of the two poets who lived and died in Italy these men grew to understand without enmity the country and the people they had come to discover through the monstrous workings of war. What no voice from Italy could have said to them in those days was being said for them by a poet of their own and one whom they held most dear; him would they read, quite often far into the night before they went back to that line across the mountains. And for many of them the house of Keats must have come to signify something more than a mere place for an idle visit or an hour of leisure. The father of one of these soldiers wrote that his son had found there serenity and strength amid a sorrow like that of Ruth.

‘when sick for home
She stood in tears amid the alien corn.’

(translated by NEVILLE ROGERS)