



THE SHAKESPEARE OXFORD NEWSLETTER

Vol. 54, No. 3

Published by the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship

Summer 2018

In the Footsteps of Vere and Roe (Part Two)

by Robert Prechter

[Editor's note: In the early fall of 2017 Robert Prechter and his wife, Robin, spent fifteen days in Italy, much of it devoted to finding the "key spots in northern Italy about which Richard Roe wrote in *The Shakespeare Guide to Italy*." Part One ran in the previous issue of the *Newsletter*.]

Pisa

On Sunday, October 8, we took a side trip to Pisa. Roe figured out that when in *The Taming of the Shrew* Shakespeare speaks twice of "Pisa, renowned for grave citizens," he is jokingly referring to the prominent citizens buried at Camposanto Monumentale, or Campo Santo (**photo 12**), a vast, partly covered structure adjacent to the basilica of Pisa. The Cathedral, Baptistry and Leaning (Bell) Tower make Pisa one of the most popular tourist sites in Italy, but we found Campo Santo more interesting. The graves (**photo 13**) are variously adorned, the grounds contain many fine statues, and the walls have partially restored frescoes dating from the 1300-1400s, one of which offers a particularly inventive vision of Hell. If Shakespeare visited Campo Santo, he saw the paintings when they were in much better shape. A stone placed (at what time I know not) prominently in

the floor at the main archway to the open lawn in the center of the facility features a lion rampant, which has figured into the crests and coats of arms of numerous European noble and royal families and countries, including England, beginning around the same time construction began on Campo Santo.

You need no special directions to find this collection of buildings, as the locals know exactly where every tourist is headed.

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12: Campo Santo, Pisa



13: Graves at Campo Santo, Pisa

conceded: “With possibly no other English author is there a greater discrepancy between the scarcity of extant historical documents that reliably deal with the author’s life [much less, Erne might have added, his literary career] and the precision with which biographers have tried to trace his life.” Erne conceded this “created a gap between how much” we really know about Shakespeare “and the inferences that can be drawn ... with a reasonable degree of certainty.... Apocryphal stories have contributed their share” Erne, “Mythography” (1998), pp. 438-439.

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Vere and Roe Part 2 (continued from page 1)

Milan

On Wednesday, we hopped a high-speed train to Milan. It was quite an experience going 110 miles per hour while working with people nearly 5,000 miles away on a laptop connected by cellphone hotspot.

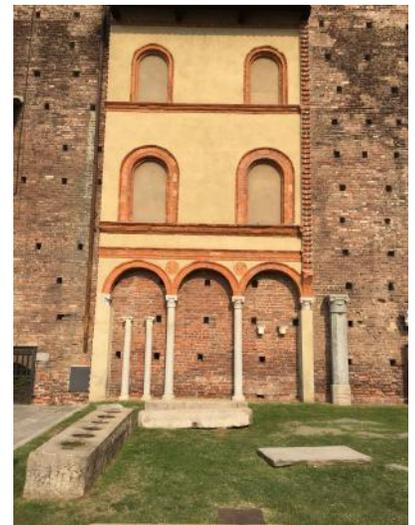
In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Silvia and her father, the Duke, would have lived within the grounds of Castello Sforzesco, in the Cortile della Rocchetta, which is adjacent to the Corte Ducale. Their wealthy friends would have lived all around them, on the periphery of the vast courtyard within the Rocchetta, whose walls today provide several examples of what the front of such homes looked like. A sign on the grounds explains, “These facades [authentic but moved from elsewhere in the city] offer important records of the typical 15th century upper-class residences organized

around an internal courtyard.” Roe’s book does not offer photos of these representative facades, so I have included two of them (**photos 14 and 15**). They offer a glimpse of the privileged world in which the play’s characters lived.

From the Castello, one can follow the probable eastward route of the characters to reach a city gate called the Porta Orientale (later replaced by the Porta Venezia, or Venice Gate), to the left of which was a postern, a semi-secret doorway through which friars ministering to plague victims could enter and leave the city after hours and adjacent to which was the Franciscan abbey in or near which Friar Patrick had a cell. **Photo 16** shows an old map of Milan (undated but available on the web), on which a building compatible with such an abbey is depicted. Possible remains of the abbey and the postern, which Roe identifies as lying “about twenty meters west of the site of the old Porta Orientale,” are implied by ancient walls



14: Façade within Cortile della Rocchetta, Milan



15: Façade within Cortile della Rocchetta, Milan



16: Old Map of Milan



17: Ruins at Site of Abbey Near Former Porta Orientale, Milan

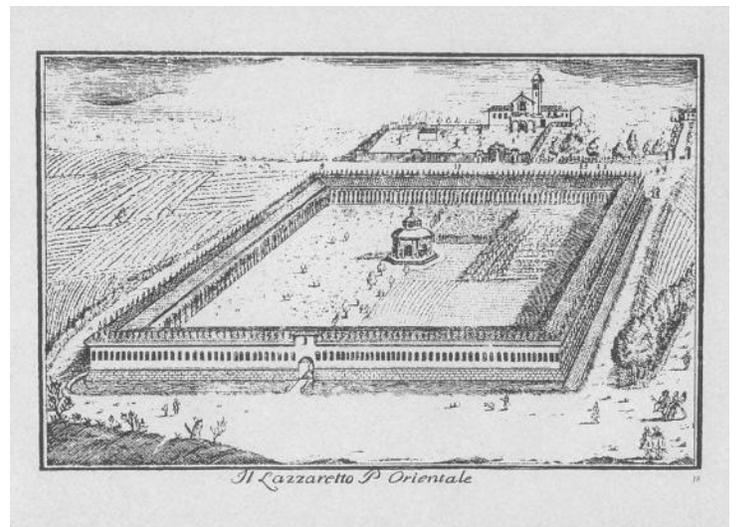


18: Remnants of Masonry at Abbey Site, Milan

and cement-fused stones jutting out from grass at the edge of Indro Montanelli Park (**photos 17 and 18**). The park originated as the Public Gardens, created in the 1700s. A sign at the site explains, “the Gardens were eventually built on land belonging to the San Dionigi and Carcanine monasteries, following their suppression under Austrian rule.” Even after the Public Gardens became a city park, “for many years they remained largely a rendezvous point and leisure spot for the Milanese aristocracy.” Shakespeare’s characters, who were members of the aristocracy in the 1570s, rendezvoused very near the same spot.

The next site we visited was the location of the infamous Il Lazzaretto, a walled quarantine facility for plague victims covering the equivalent of twenty square blocks that went under construction in 1488. It contained Il Pozzo di San Gregorio, or St. Gregory’s Well, a mass grave for tens of thousands of victims of the plague, a hellish place to which Proteus directs the unsuspecting Thurio in the play. **Photo 19**, also from the web, shows an old depiction of it. Our walk took us right past the location of Il Lazzaretto’s only entrance.

We visited the church within Il Lazzaretto now called San Carlo al Lazzaretto that in the 1500s was named Santa Maria della Sanita. Just outside the border of that area is the current Church of San Gregorio, built around 1900, whose priest provided Roe with some information. The priest told Roe that the new structure was built “on top of the bones,” but he could mean only bones within the churchyard, not those within Il Lazzaretto, whose border was across the street; or perhaps he was using a bit of poetic license. Finally, we located the site of the original church of San Gregorio, which had stood outside the Lazzaretto. According to the old map reproduced in Roe’s book and Roe’s modern-day delineation of the border of Il Lazzaretto, the original church was, as the



19: Depiction of Il Lazzaretto, Milan



20-21: Site of Original San Gregorio Church, Milan

priest told Roe, on the same side of Via San Gregorio as the new church. It was not, however, adjacent to the street but rather occupied an area one-half to one block northeast of the street. Happily, that precise area is now a park (**photos 20 and 21**), so you can stand directly on the spot. It was a satisfying place to end our pilgrimage.

To get there: The Castello Sforzesco is a tourist site, so all the maps show it. To get from there to the Porta Venezia following the most likely path of the characters, exit the grounds on the northeast walkway, which at the cross street Foro Buonaparte becomes Via Tivoli, then Via Pontaccio, then Via Fatebenefratelli. Five blocks later, bear slightly left at a multi-street intersection to reach the Piazza Cayour. To its right side, locate Via Palestro and follow it as it skirts Indro Montanelli Park. Turn left on Corso Venezia until you reach the end of the park. Straight ahead is the Porta Venezia. Turn left on Bastioni di Porta Venezia, and a few yards down the street on your left, you will find a park gate, which is situated near the old abbey site. There and toward the right are the ruins.

Next, cross Bastioni di Porta Venezia and walk toward your left, passing entrances to Via Alessandro Tadino, Via Lecco and Via Lodovico Settala until you reach Via Lazzaretto. You have just traversed the southwestern edge of the site of Il Lazzaretto. In the middle of that walk you passed the location of its only entrance, on your right. Turn right onto Via Lazzaretto. In two blocks, turn right onto Via Lazzaro Palazzi and walk two blocks to find, on your left, the original Santa Maria della Sanita, renamed San Carlo al Lazzaretto around 1630. Retrace your steps to Via Lazzaretto, turn right and walk three blocks. At the Piazza Cincinnato, turn right onto Via San Gregorio. At the end of the first block, on your left at the corner of Via Lodovico Settala, you will see the old church's replacement, the new San Gregorio. Walk one more block in the same direction

until on your left you spot a walkway, a fountain and a grassy park. Turn left onto those grounds, walk about two-thirds of a block, and you will be standing on the location of the original church of San Gregorio.

We did not visit the only intact portion of Il Lazzaretto, and Roe does not say where it is. He includes a photo and says that the Russian Orthodox Church possesses it. A bit of web searching turned up nearly an exact copy of one of his photos of the place, so I can confirm that it is located at #5 Via San Gregorio, home of the Parish of Saints Nicholas and Ambrose at Lazzaretto, which is about a block southeast of the park, just past Via Alessandro Tadino.

What a memorable trip it was. We pre-booked small, centrally located, locally run, medium-budget hotels, and we loved all of them. Our hotel in Florence was so unassuming that we passed its entrance twice before spotting a sign noting it was on the third floor of the building. Aside from two rude government employees at the Milan airport, the people of Italy were friendly, and our hosts in Milan were gracious. Almost every meal was memorably good (we mostly avoided the ubiquitous pizza and pasta). The best wine we had was Amarone, from the Veneto region near Verona. The early fall weather—being either sunny or overcast but consistently mild—was perfect for our trip. The lesser concentration of tourists late in the season made it easy to visit even the most popular sites. Miraculously, the stock market was so calm throughout our trip that a widely followed measure of market volatility slipped to record lows. In retrospect, we couldn't have chosen a better time to go.

