

Croydon Catenians revisit Picinisco



By popular demand, Frank and Adelia Delicata of Croydon Circle organised a second trip in May to their ancestral home, Picinisco, in the Lazio region of Italy, halfway between Rome and Naples. It is a medieval mountain village with stunning views over the picturesque Comino Valley. Picinisco is also the hereditary home of thousands of Italians who have settled in Scotland over the last 150 years. Many left Picinisco to work in Scotland after WW2 where some founded successful ice-cream businesses! Returning to their native village, many Scots Italians have rebuilt their family homes and brought fresh prosperity to the area. Picinisco was featured recently, together with its neighbouring hamlet, I Ciaccia in Channel 4's series, "Help! We Have Bought a Village". I Ciaccia was restored by Cesidio di Ciacca, a former Edinburgh lawyer. He also helped with the reconstruction of San Lorenzo, a beautiful, ancient church in the ramparts of Picinisco, damaged by an earthquake in 1984. There, the Catenians were welcomed to Mass by its Phillipine parish priest.

Cesidio, a friend of Frank and Adelia, greeted Croydon Catenians with their wives and friends on their arrival. Many of them stayed at his hotel, Sotto le Stelle, a former Bishop's Palace in the ramparts of the town with balconies overlooking the surrounding mountains and valleys. Others stayed nearby at Villa Inglese, a hotel with a British gourmet chef who has worked in Michelin starred restaurants in Rome. He treated everyone to a luscious taster dinner menu of Italian delicacies foraged locally from the mountainside.

Wine tasting at Cesidio's vineyard and learning how to make their own ravioli and fettucine for lunch were new skills acquired by Croydon Catenians in the kitchen of his restaurant I Cacca. They were also taught how to make Ricotta cheese at the Pacitti creamery attached to Casa Lawrence, in the Comino Valley, where DH Lawrence stayed and was inspired to write his novel "The Lost Girl". Whilst enjoying lunch of local produce



and pecorino cheeses, two local musicians enticed them to dance to their accordion and guitar!

A cameraman for Channel 4 filmed many of these activities, including the cultural highlight of the tour, an Opera Evening at I Caccia restaurant. This starred Paola Alonzi, Soprano and Adriano Gentili, Tenor from the Rome Opera who sang 15 famous Italian arias accompanied by the pianist Massimiliano Franchina. Croydon Catenians may thus see themselves starring in a new series of "Help! We Have Bought a Village" when it returns to our screens.



The tour wasn't all eating, drinking and merrymaking on coach trips! Other delights in the Comino Valley included a visit to the Castle of Isola del Liri which is famous for its spectacular waterfalls and a trip to Atina Monday market, held in the historic centre of the town as well as dinners at local restaurants and their favourite gelateria. The Catenians also had a guided tour of the hilltop Abbey of Monte Cassino which is commemorating this year the 80th anniversary of its WW2 battle. Later they paid a quiet visit to the British War Cemetery nearby. Another memorable visit was to the shrine of Our Lady of Canneto, where she appeared in 819AD to a local shepherdess. Set in the beautiful national park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise, it is today a popular pilgrimage site which thousands visit, particularly in August.



A beautiful hilltop town, Picinisco, with its changing light and extraordinary sunsets, is a welcoming and unforgettable place in which to stay and explore the surrounding area.

Pat Cook

