

## Croydon Circle Trip to Picinisco

If I was to take you back to the place of my birth, it would be the main road going from the university to a place called Portswood in Southampton. Not especially exciting and certainly not exotic as the ancestral home of Frank and Adelia Delicata, which is nestled in the Appenine mountains in Italy; a picturesque village



called Picinisco. Even the name sounds musical and mysterious. Led by the Delicatas, in May 2022, a group of 25 Croydon Catenians set off on a pilgrimage to this beautiful unspoilt area. We stayed for a week, and bonded in friendship with fun and laughter, sharing delicious food, and toured around this beautiful mountainous region. After a tiring journey we arrived to a wonderful welcome where all the villagers knew we were coming and so were keenly awaiting our arrival. We were immediately made to feel at home.

Our first meal was quintessentially Italian, with regional food in plenty. Everyone we met was friendly and welcoming despite a sudden downpour of rain. Fortunately this was the only inclement weather we had all week. It was followed by six days of glorious sunshine.

The next morning, after a continental breakfast on the balcony overlooking the most spectacular mountainous views, we set off on our tour bus to the local market town of Sora. After exploring the produce we sat drinking coffee in the local piazza and later that evening we dined on delicious pizzas and drank the regional wines.



Our third day in Italy we were taken to the Abbey of Monte Cassino with its stunning hilltop location where St Benedict founded his Benedictine order in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. It is a site of huge religious, cultural and historic significance. After its infamous destruction during the battle of Monte Cassino in WW2 it was completely rebuilt after the war, and it is an evocative and beautiful place. Back in Picinisco, we enjoyed a long, relaxed lunch based on locally sourced, seasonal ingredients at Villa Inglese and later an indulgent visit to an ice cream parlour to partake of some Italian ice cream that is justifiably famous throughout the World.





There was no let-up in the packed itinerary organised by our tireless hosts Frank and Adelia. The next day they took us just outside Picinisco to I Ciacca, a local vineyard, for a comprehensive tour followed by extensive tasting of the excellent wine. The grapes are grown in the pristine air of the Appenine mountains; the wine is entirely organic and uses the Maturano grape which is an ancient variety rarely found outside of this region of Italy. The resulting wine is magnificent.

Mass on Sunday morning in the local church of San Lorenzo was a particularly special occasion. Our group was given the warmest of welcomes by the Priest, who gave an inspiring and emotional sermon (in both Italian and English) on the subject of love and fellowship which epitomised the best elements of the Catenian brotherhood and encapsulated the spirit of our trip. After Mass, we joined the locals of Picinisco for coffee in the sun drenched piazza.



The meals we enjoyed during our visit were based on regional specialities usually using locally produced ingredients, so it was a delight to have the opportunity to visit a local cheese producer a couple of kilometres down the hill from Picinisco. The cheese maker was at Casa Lawrence, so named as DH Lawrence lived there for a short while when he was travelling and writing in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century where he apparently wrote "The Lost Girl". There were demonstrations of traditional cheese making and many members of our group joined in the fun, making their own Italian cheese.

DH Lawrence observed two particular things about Picinisco: he noted how beautiful the area was and the warmth of the welcome given to visitors. In addition to those comments I would also say that the locals take a special pride in their area, culture and history, which is really encouraging. It is clear to anyone visiting that this area is a very special place and the locals know they are blessed to live in an area of such beauty, and they work hard to preserve its pristine nature.





Our final night in Picinisco was a particularly special evening. Dinner was hosted by Cesidio Di Ciacca, his wife Selina and son Giovanni, who are the owners of Sotto le Stelle, the hotel we stayed at. This was held in Cesidio's ancestral home, I Ciacca, which is nestled in the middle of his vineyard. A wonderful dinner in gorgeous surroundings was accompanied by traditional music. After dinner there was traditional folk dancing which everyone was encouraged to join in. This was a magical end to a wonderful week.

Our thanks go to our hosts, to the good people of Picinisco and especially to Frank and Adelia.

**Sue Nelligan**

