

Sant'Isidoro a Capo le Case



Sant'Isidoro a Capo le Case is a 17th century convent church in the modern rione Ludovisi (the historic rione Colonna). The dedication is to St [Isidore the Farmer](#) (also known as Isidore the Labourer), who is patron of the city of Madrid in Spain, and to St. Patrick. This is the national churches of Ireland. The church is served by the Irish Reformed Franciscan Observants. (1) (a)

History

The church and convent were founded by Spanish "Reformed Observant" Franciscans in 1622, the same year that St Isidore of Madrid was canonized. The founders had a patron in Ottaviano Vestri, a famous jurist from Barbiano who left a legacy (his death had been in 1574). Construction began in 1622, the architect was **Antonio Felice Casoni**. However, things must have gone badly wrong because the brethren went back to Spain only two years later and left the project abandoned. Money seems to have been a problem. (1) (6)

The unfinished complex, and the debts attached to it, devolved to the central curia of the Franciscan order at Santa Maria in Aracoeli. Resident at that time in the convent of San Pietro in Montorio was a famous Irish Franciscan friar and theologian called [Luke Wadding](#), O.F.M., a voluminous writer

and a very forceful personality. He had the idea of founding a house of studies for Irish Franciscans, and the Franciscan order handed over the complex to him. The new convent was ratified by a bull from Pope Urban VIII in 1625, with Wadding as superior. (1) (a)

In the same year and by a bull of the same pope, the Pontifical Irish College was founded as a college and seminary for Irish candidates for the priesthood. The major patron of this was Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi, the founder of the nearby famous villa and gardens of the Villa Ludovisi. The first students took up residence in a house opposite the convent in 1628, under the supervision of Wadding, but the Jesuits took over in 1635. This was according to the will of the Cardinal, which Wadding tried and failed to overturn. The college was moved, and is now located at Via dei Santi Quattro near the Lateran. (1)

Casoni continued work on the church until 1634, when there was a pause. The main altar and presbiterium were designed by **Mario Arconio**, 1630. **Domenico Castelli** worked on the choir and portico in the year after 1640, but the façade was left unfinished. The church was finally consecrated in this state in 1684, with a secondary dedication to St Patrick. (1) (2) (6)

The friars finally got the money together to finish the church, and in 1703 the façade was completed by **Carlo Francesco Bizzaccheri**. The convent was forcibly closed during the Napoleonic occupation, after 1798, because Ireland was then part of the United Kingdom. (1)

In 1809 six art students at the Vienna Academy, who had been influenced by the German Romantic movement, decided to found their own artistic school in order to further the expression of honesty and spirituality in religious art. Basically, they hated formulaic Neo-Classical posturing. They called their group the Lukasbund or "Brotherhood of St Luke", but their detractors thought that they were Biblical posers and called them the Nazarenes. The latter name stuck. In 1810, four of them led by Johann Friedrich Overbeck moved to Rome and were allowed to live in the abandoned friary. There they lived a semi-monastic existence, imagining that this is how the great artists in the Middle Ages lived. This colony attracted others, notably Joseph Anton Koch who became very influential. They were especially important in instigating the revival of fresco painting on walls and ceilings. The glory days of this artists' colony lasted about ten years, until the Franciscans received their convent back. Apart from Overbeck, the members went back to Germany and Austria and some had important later careers. They left a memorial in the name of the street on which the church stands -Via degli Artisti. (1) (6)

Because of its status as a college, the convent was not expropriated by the Italian government in the 1870's. However events in Ireland in the 20th century led to the Irish Franciscans withdrawing from the convent in 2008, as they lacked the personnel to continue religious life there. (1)

The convent was leased back to the Generalate of the Order of Friars Minor, which transferred the personnel and chattels of the convent of San Bonaventura in Grottaferrata to it. This includes a famous library. At present, the community is a mix of several nationalities although the intention is to try and maintain the Irish connection somehow. (1)

The Cappella de Sylva was restored in 2002. (1)

Exterior

The church is an integral part of the convent, which is a single structure standing in a garden away from the street. Fortunately it has not been altered or added to much since its original construction, and is an important example of an unspoilt 17th century convent. (1)

The church is at the south-east corner, and has an internal loggia with ancillary rooms over, having its own pitched and tiled roof. The fabric of the convent and church is in red brick, with the church façade in white stucco. (1)

Cloisters

The main cloister, called the Wadding Cloister because it was built by him in 1630, is to the north-west of the church. It has arcades on all four sides, but these are interrupted by the far left hand corner of the church which intrudes slightly on the plan. (1)

The two fresco cycles in the walks are by **Fra Giovanni Antonio Sguary**, a Franciscan artist, 1701. The main depictions are portraits of forty-nine Franciscan saints, while the thirty lunettes above depict scenes from the life of St Francis. (1)

To the south of this, and to the west or left hand side of the church, is the tiny Spanish Cloister built for the original Spanish friars. This has to be a candidate for the smallest convent cloister in Rome. It has an old well in it. (1)

The cloister walks have modern paintings of the *Crucifix of San Damiano* and *St Francis Receiving the Stigmata*, a copy of a 15th century work. Also here are older, anonymous works featuring *Our Lady of Sorrows* and *The Resurrected Christ*. (1)

Campanile

The tower campanile is inserted into the bottom left hand corner of the church, behind the entrance block. It has three storeys, the first two of which have an arched aperture on each face. The third is low, above a strongly projecting cornice, and is a little cuboidal kiosk with an arched cornice on each side. There used to be a clock in here, and the derelict clockface is still visible from in front of the church. (1)

Façade (1)

The late Baroque (tardobarocco) façade is by **Carlo Francesco Bizzaccheri**. The stucco work is by **Andrea Bertoni**. Because the church is on a crypt, the entrance is accessed by a pair of double transverse staircases with solid parapets. The wrought iron screen at the access to these is original (as are the garden gates that you might be looking through to see the church). In the revetment wall below the terrace is a rectangular niche with a good-quality colored Spanish majolica relief of the *Madonna and Child*. A matching relief of *St Francis* is on the convent wall next to the façade on the left hand side. (1) (a)

There are two storeys, of equal width. The first one fronts the loggia, and has three arches of unequal size. The side ones are smaller, and have decorative panels above them. The central one reaches to the dividing entablature, which is supported by four Ionic pilasters with swagged capitals. The outer pilasters do not occupy the corners of the façade, but are slightly within. There is another arch around the corner on each side. In the portico are the full length portraits of *St. Bridget* and *St. Patrick*, patron and patroness of Ireland. (1) (a)

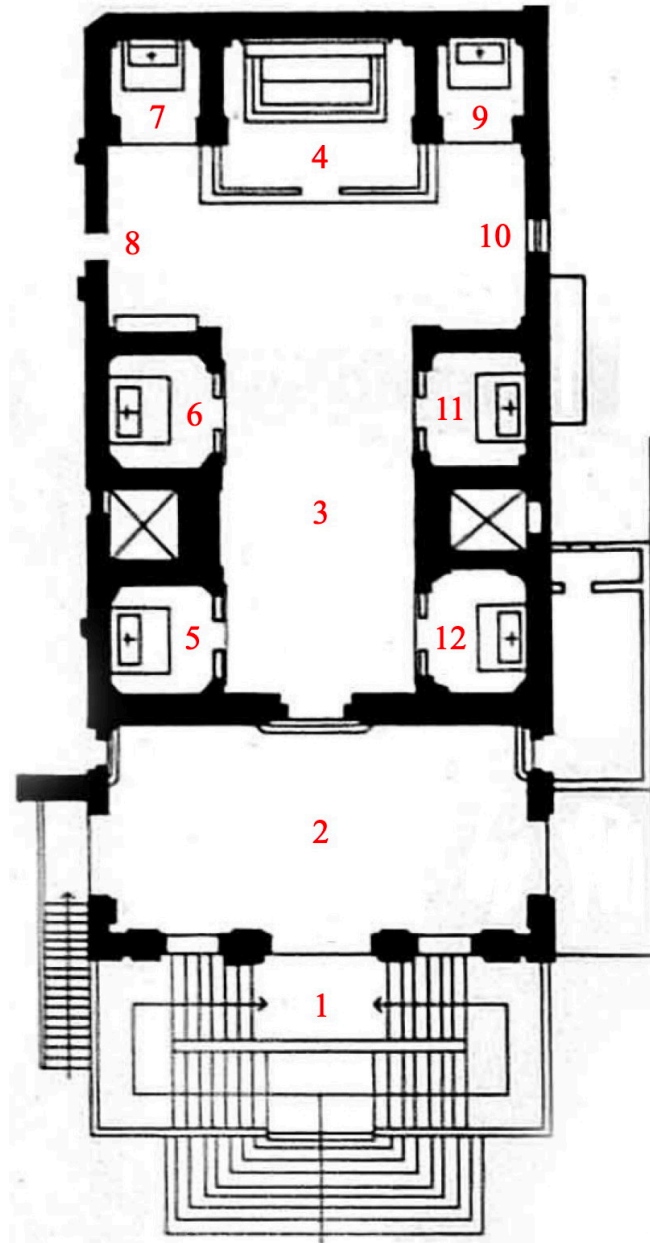
The second storey has four corresponding Corinthian pilasters, the other pair of which are doubletted and flanked by a pair of curlicue sprays. The pilasters support a crowning triangular pediment with four flaming square-vase finials. In the tympanum is a Baroque tablet with a dedicatory inscription - **D'[ivo] Isidoro Agricolae dicatum** - and the curved projecting cornice over this obscures the apex of the pediment. (1) (a)

The large central window has been reduced in size at some stage. It was originally round-headed, with a balustrade and a very complicated and curlicued pediment which hints at the architect's tendency to go rococo. Stucco flower chains hang down each side of the window. In between the pilasters are two statues, one of *St Isidore* and one of *St Patrick*, both by **Simone Giorgini**. (1) (6)

Loggia (2)

In the loggia, on either side of the church entrance are two large painting of St. Patrick, on the left, and the Virgin Mary, on the right. Above the entrance is a small fresco the the Holy Family. In the center of the ceiling is the Franciscan symbol.

Plan



Interior

Nave (3)

The little nave has two chapels on each side, unusually not contiguous but separated by a large rectangular window on each side. The windows and chapel arches are separated by gigantic Composite pilasters which support a pair of entablatures running down the sides of the church but not across the apse or counterfaçade. On these is the barrel-vaulted ceiling, which has a central capsule-shaped panel containing a fresco depicting *The Apotheosis of St Isidore* by **Jacob van Loo**. (1)

The counterfaçade has a large lunette window looking into the room over the loggia. Over the entrance is the Franciscan symbol in stucco. (1)

The overall decor is in white on cream, which matches the dignified restraint of the understated Baroque stucco detailing. (1)

Transept and sanctuary (4)

There is a cupola over the crossing of the transept, which has a lantern and is divided into eight sectors by ribs with gilded stucco fronds. The sectors contain frescoes by **Domenico Bartolini**, 1856 which depict *Our Lady*, *St Patrick* and six Franciscan saints. The dome pendentives show the

The apse has its own short barrel vault, with the *Dove of the Holy Spirit*. In the lunette above the altar *Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane* by **Silvio Galimberti**, 1948. (1)

The high altar is richly and beautifully inlaid with alabasters. The altar aedicule is against the far wall, and adorned with two beautiful columns of Oriental alabaster with gilded capital. These support a split triangular pediment flanking a tablet with a garlanded winged putto's head, over which is a segmental pediment. The tabernacle is by **Ippolito Mazzola**, 1799. In the Carrara and Portovenere marble urn beneath it are the relics of SS. Leontius and Florianus, ancient Roman martyrs, presented to the church by Innocent VIII and Urban X. The altarpiece depicting *The Vision of Our Lady to St Isidore* is by **Andrea Sacchi**, 1622. (1) (2) (6) (a)

Side Chapels and memorials

The side chapels are described clockwise, beginning to the left of the entrance. In contrast to the main body of the church, they are richly decorated.

Chapel of the Crucifix (5)

The first chapel on the left is dedicated to the Crucifix, and was erected by Constantia, sister to Prince Camillus Pamphilj, and wife to Prince Piombino. The decoration in golden stucco is by **Domenico Castelli**.

Over the altar, which is adorned with two columns of giallo antico, the bronze corpus on a wooden cross was donated by the Ludovisi family in 1835. In the lunette to the left is the *Agony in the Garden*; in that to the right is the *Crowning with Thorns*. The cupola has *The Exaltation of the Cross*, all by **Carlo Maratta**. (1) (6)

Chapel of St Anthony of Padua (6)

The second chapel on the left is dedicated to St Anthony of Padua, and was the Cappella Gaetani. It was re-fitted by **Carlo Francesco Bizzaccheri**, 1681-1688. The altarpiece showing the *St Anthony having a vision of the Christ-Child* is by **Giovanni Domenico Cerrini**, 1655. The side wall frescoes show *Miracles of St. Anthony*, and are by **Pietro Paoletti** 1830. The lunettes are *Healing of the sick child* and *Preaching to the fish* by **Gillis Hallet**, Belgian painter from Liege. (1) (2) (6)

Chapel of SS Francis and Patrick (7)

The chapel to the left of the sanctuary is dedicated to St Francis, and was founded by Pietro Panvini of Rimini, Protonotary Apostolic, who died in 1626, and whose monument is affixed to the left side-wall of the chapel. The anonymous Spanish altarpiece of *St Francis receiving the Stigmata* is early 17th century. On the right wall is a modern picture of *St Patrick* by **Galimberti**. The impressive cupola is in gilded stucco, with the *Dove of the Holy Spirit*, and putti holding a scroll, by **Mariano Sozzi**. (1) (2) (a)

In the lunette on the left side is the symbol of the Franciscan order. The right side lunette has a miracle of St. Francis.

Opposite the altar is a recumbent effigy of Octavia Catherine Bryan, an 18 year old Irish girl, who caught a fever and died during a visit to Rome in 1864 by **Vincenzo Gajassi**; and to Antonio Barano, 1667 by **Francesco De Rossi**. (1) (4)

Outside of the chapel, in the left transept (8) is the Monument for Antonio Borani (1677) by **Giovanni Francesco de Rossi**, his last known work. Also here is a large painting of *St Patrick* by **Fra Ippolito da Poggio Bustone** (1861). The adjoining door leads to the sacristy. In the sacristy are several paintings, among which is a *Crucifixion*, which belonged to the Piombino chapel, by **Carlo Maratta**. (6) (a)

Chapel of the Immaculate Conception (9) (Cappella De Sylva)

The Cappella De Sylva to the right of the sanctuary was designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini in 1663, for his friend, Rodrigo Lopez da Sylva, a Portuguese aristocrat with whom he shared lodgings at nearby Via Della Mercede. It is tiny, but spectacular. The dedication is to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, and the elliptical altarpiece, *Immaculate Conception*, by **Maratta**, is in a frame with fruits and flowers by the engraver **Antonio Chicari**. It fits into the pendentive arch of the cupola, is supported by a pair of putti and has a backdrop of alabaster. The same stone is used in the altar frontal, to good effect (not the usual symmetrical revetting slabs). (1) (6)

On the left wall is *St. Francis*, on the right, *St. Anthony of Padua* and in the lunette *Angel Musicians*, all works by **Maratta**. The cupola, with its pendentives, is entirely gilded. This does not work very well artistically, as it obscures the figurative detailing of the stucco reliefs which include putti. Bernini knew better than to suggest something like this, so presumably it was the client's fault. (1) (6)

The side walls and the left hand lunette have frescoes of putti; the right hand lunette is a window. The side walls also have a pair of matching memorials of members of the De Sylva family, which are by **Paolo Valentino Bernini** who was a son of Gian Lorenzo. Each has a marble bas-relief of two family members, in a red jasper frame surrounded by a rumpled cloth of black marble. The right hand monument has a relief portrait in an oval tondo on top, and two white marble female allegorical virtues in the black marble wrap. *Peace* is on the left, with an olive branch, and *Justice* on the right, with fasces. (1)

The best thing in the church is the monument on the left, the memorial monument to Rodrigo de Sylva and his wife Beatriz de Silveira, designed by Bernini. It also has a bas-relief framed in red jasper and surrounded by a black marble cloth, but the tondo on top has a portrait bust not a relief. The two allegorical females are *Charity* to the left, and *Truth* to the right, by **Giulio Cartari** and **Paolo Naldini**, from Bernini's workshop. Both are bare-breasted, and *Charity* is giving her own voluminous mammaries a squeeze while smiling. The Irish Franciscans had so much trouble with their more suggestible brethren over this pair that, in 1860, they gave the two of them tops in bronze to wear. It was restored in 2002 by the Italian Arts Ministry, and bronze clothing was removed. Furthermore, the restoration also uncovered frescoes by **Giacinto Gimignani**, frescoes which some sensitive soul had simply painted over during a previous "clean-up" of the chapel. (1) (5) (6)

The monument to the right, outside the chapel, is for Alfonso Mazanedo de Quiñones, a noble Spaniard, patriarch of Jerusalem, who died in 1628 and was the original sponsor for this chapel. Between this chapel and the tribune is the monumental slab of [Francis Porter](#) O. S. F., a distinguished Irishman, author of various works. He had been Theologian and Historian to James II; and died in 1702, aged 80 years. (a)

Altar of St John Nepomucene (10)

Around the corner in the right hand end of the transept is an altar dedicated to St John Nepomucene. The altarpiece, *Glory of St. John of Nepomuk*, is a copy of a work by **Carlo Maratta**. Here are memorials to Amelia Curran by **John Hogan**, 1838 and Alfonso Mazanedo de Quiñones, 1628. (1) (2) (6)

Chapel of St Anne (11)

The second chapel on the right is dedicated to St Anne, mother of Our Lady, and was founded and designed by **Domenico Castelli**, a Roman architect, who is interred within its walls, and who constituted the Barberini family his heirs, by whom the chapel has been endowed. The altarpiece of *St. Anne with the Madonna and Child* is by **Pietro Paolo Naldini** (1663). He also executed the side wall frescoes showing *The Birth of Our Lady* and *The Presentation of Our Lady at the Temple* on the right. In the lunette to the left are *St. Joachim and St. Anne*; in that to the right is *an angel appearing to S. Joseph and the B. Virgin*. In the small cupola are the *four Evangelists*, all by **Pietro Paolo Baldini**, a pupil of Pietro da Gortona. (1) (6) (a)

Immediately outside the chapel is the sepulchral slab of [Bonaventure Baron](#), a distinguished Irish Franciscan, who wrote twenty-two vols on various. In front, opposite the chapel, is the monumental inscription of Father [Luke Wadding](#), O. S. F., who died in 1657, in his seventieth year, and whose

remains repose in the annexed cemetery. Adjoining Father Wadding's memorial is that of [Hugh McCaghwell](#), O. S. F., Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of all Ireland, who died in 1626, aged 55 years. To the left is the monumental slab of James Taaf O. S. F., of the noble house of Taaf of Carlingford, who had been Confessor to the Consort of James II. (a)

Chapel of St Joseph (12)

The first chapel on the right is dedicated to St Joseph, and was founded and endowed by Flavio Alaleoni, a noble Roman, who lies buried beneath his monumental slab to the right, erected by himself in 1563, as was also the slab to the left, recording the dedication of the chapel, and the foundation by him therein of a daily Mass. The paintings are all by **Carlo Maratta**. The decoration of this chapel was one of his first commissions. (1) (6) (a)

The altarpiece shows the *Marriage to Our Lady to St. Joseph*. This is a copy as the original was taken by the Frence in 1798. The side walls have *The Flight to Egypt*, on the left, and *The Death of St Joseph*, on the right. This is also copy as the original was taken in 1798. The cupola shows *The Apotheosis of St Joseph*. In the lunettes are *Nativity* and *Dream of St. Joseph*. (1) (6)

Here are memorials to Isabella Ball Sherlock from Waterford, Ireland, by **Giovanni Maria Benzoni**, and Margaret Meigham Harris (1846). (1) (2)

Relics

St. Lontius

St. Florian

Buried

Catherine Bryan Talbot

<died at age 19 shortly after her marriage to a Borgese>

Flavio Alaleoni

Francis [Porter](#) O. S. F. († 1702)

<Theologian and Historian to James II>

De Sylva family members

Antonio Borani of Milan († 1677)

<Protonotary Apostolic>

Pietro Panvini of Rimini († 1626)

<Protonotary Apostolic>

Hugh [McCaghwell](#), O. S. F. (1571-1626)

<Archibishop of Armagh and Primate of all Ireland>

Amelia [Curran](#) (1775-1847)

<Irish painter>

Alfonso Mazanedo [de Quiñones](#) (1552-1627)

<Titular Patriarch of Jerusalem {Gerusalemme}>

Isabella Ball Sherlock

Margaret Meigham Harris

Bonaventure [Baron](#)

<Distinguished Irish Franciscan>

O. Bryan

Domenico [Castelli](#) [aka *Fontanino*] (1582-1655)

<Italian architect>

Artists and Architects:

Andrea Bertoni (17th cent), Italian stucco artist

Andrea [Sacchi](#) (1599-1661), Italian painter of High Baroque

Antonio Chicari [aka *Il Pisano*], (17th cent.), Italian engraver

Antonio Felice [Casoni](#) (1559-1634), Italian architect and sculptor

Carlo Francesco [Bizzaccheri](#) (1656-1721), Italian architect early Baroque and Rococo style

Carlo [Maratta](#) (1625-1713), Italian Late Baroque Classical painter

Domenico [Bartolini](#) (1827-1884), Italian painter

Domenico [Castelli](#) [aka *Fontanino*] (1582-1657), Italian architect

Giacinto [Gimignani](#) (1606-1681), Italian painter of the Baroque period

Gian Lorenzo [Bernini](#) (1598-1680), Italian Baroque sculptor and architect [also see [here](#)]
 Gillis [Hallet](#) (1620-1694), Belgian painter from Liege
 Giovanni Antonio Sguary (17th cent), Italian painter, Franciscan friar
 Giovanni Domenico [Cerrini](#) [aka *il Cavalier Perugino*] (1609-1681), Italian painter of the Baroque period
 Giovanni Francesco [de Rossi](#) [aka *La Vecchietta*] (active 1640-1677), Italian sculptor
 Giovanni Maria [Benzoni](#) (1809-1873), Italian Neoclassic sculptor from Bergamo
 Giulio [Cartari](#) (17th cent.), Italian sculptor
 Fra Ippolito da Poggio Bustone (19th cent.), Italian painter
 Ippolito Mazzola (d.1799), Italian artist
 Jacob [van Loo](#) (1614-1670), Flemish painter
 John [Hogan](#) (1800-1858), Irish sculptor
 Mariano Sozzi, Italian painter
 Mario [Arconio](#) (1575-1635), Italian architect
 Paolo Valentino [Bernini](#) (1648-1728), Italian sculptor
 Pietro [Paolètti](#) (1801-1847), Italian painter and engraver
 Pietro Paolo [Naldini](#) (1619-1691), Italian painter, sculptor
 Pietro Paolo [Baldini](#) [or Ubaldini], (17th cent), Italian artist of the late Baroque period
 Silvio [Galimberti](#) (1869-1956), Italian painter
 Simone [Giorgini](#) (active 1677-1712), Italian sculptor
 Vincenzo [Gajassi](#) (1811-1861), Italian sculptor and printmaker

Location:

Addr: Via degli Artisti, 41, 00187 Roma
 Coord: [41°54'21"N 12°29'13"E](#)

Info:

Telephone: 0039 06 4885359

Note: the church is open by **appointment** from Monday to Saturday from 10.00 to 18.00 by phone at 064 885 359

Links and sources:

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
2. [Info Roma web site](#)
3. [060608.it](#)
4. [Church web site](#)
5. [Article in The Irish Times](#), Fri, Apr 24, 2020
6. [Romapedia blog](#)
 - a. Donovan, Jeremiah; ROME ANCIENT AND MODERN AND ITS ENVIRONS; 1842; Pg. V2:162
 - b. Sharp, Mary; A GUIDE TO THE CHURCHES OF ROME; 1966; Pg. 107

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