

The Local History section in the Public Library

The local history section of the Public Library holds around 10,000 volumes dedicated to the Chieri and Turin area, to the Piedmont province and to the regions, covering a wide range of subjects.

The collection of Chieri periodicals begins in 1873 with the "Cittadino Chierese" (the "Chieri Citizen") and thanks to the presence of various papers, such as the "L'Arco and Il Faro" (the Bow and the Lighthouse), reaches our current times with the "Corriere di Chieri" (the Chieri Courier). Furthermore there are many contemporary periodicals of historic-artistic interest, and a collection of "the Gazzetta del Popolo" (the People's Gazette) from 1888 to 1984, and from "La Stampa" (the Turin newspaper) from 1965 until today. Of great social interest is the photographic collection and the collaboration with the *Storiandoli* project that collects oral testimonies from local citizens.

The Textile Museum

The textile museum is a place where you can see looms, warping machines, measurement and weight instruments, watercolour sketches, books, magazines, graduate thesis and old and modern catalogues of patterns.

The textile museum in Chieri was founded in 1996. It is rich in equipment from Medieval times to the XX century and is located in Via Demaria 10, on the corner of via Santa Clara, in premises that used to be the XV century convent of the

Clarisse nuns (the Poor Clares) Another branch of the Museum is located in the renovated old factory of the *"Imbiancheria"*, characterised by a tall chimney. In 1999, within the museum itself, the Association *"Friends of the Ricamo Bandera"* was established, dedicated to reviving an embroidery technique that was very popular in Piedmont in the 1600's. More recently the museum has activated an innovative *Social Tailor's shop*, open to students, new graduates and citizens, as well as a *Botanical Garden* of plants used in textiles and dyes.

The Municipal Historical Archives of Chieri

The Municipal Historical Archives of Chieri conserve the most ancient documents of the town. The oldest document dates back to 1194 and is an alliance treaty with the town of Asti. The documents are very varied. There are the minutes of the council (from 1328), accountancy registers, taxation books and registers of military conscripts. The oldest series are the registers of landed property dating back to 1253. A few hundred types of drawings and maps cover the period from 1730 to 1950 approximately. There is also a rare medieval map, the so-called *"Map of the Hanged Man"*, from 1457. Also of note are the archives of the *"Accademia degli Irrequieti"* (the Academy of the Restless) and the registers of married couples. Finally there are two bodies of very significant documents: the archive of the *"Ospedale Maggiore"*, the general hospital, (1383-1982) and the Archives of *"Ospizio di Carità"*— a charity hospice (1316-1975). From 2003 this archive is dedicated to the memory of Filippo Ghirardi (1918-2002).

Chieri Archaeological Exhibition (MAC)

The M.A.C. (Chieri Archaeological Exhibition) illustrates materials excavated by the *Gruppo Archaeological dei Giovani Esploratori* (Archeological Group of Young Explorers) and a selection of artefacts recovered from stratigraphical analysis conducted over time under the supervision of the Regional Archeological Authority.

The artefacts are from the Roman age through to the early Middle Ages, and offer some points of interest for reflecting on the history of the town and the surrounding area. The first section shows a bank of amphorae, used as a drainage system (end of I – beginning of II century, excavations in via Tana, 1993). The main section is dedicated to the funeral relics of a necropolis that was found at Ponte Nuovo (A.D. I) while the final section shows ceramic items from the Roman and early Middle Ages and up until today.

The 20th century Architecture and painting

Chieri has also known two world wars, fascism and the Resistance. In spite of these events, it seems to have survived in a “situation of superficial tranquility”.

Some textile factories were significantly extended at the

beginning of the century: Gallina, (in the first years of the century); Caselli, (between 1934 and 1950) and Tabasso (between 1955 and 1960). Others, of significant artistic value, have been abandoned or converted into residential buildings: Chiara, Fasano, Vergnano, Vastapane, Tosco, Piovano, Sapino, Vittone. During the twenties, the school complex in Piazza Pellico and the Public Baths in Balbo Street, both in neo-classical/fascist style, were built. In the context of modern painting, Chieri became a "privileged artistic coterie" thanks to the works of Luigi Roccati (an apprentice of Felice Casorati and of Father Angelico Pistarino) and of other talented artists such as Burruni, Demo Ferrero, Fonio, Patrito, Volpato. In the last thirty years of the century, the painting award "*La Navetta d'oro*" (1965-1972), organized by the Pro Chieri committee and the "*Biennale of Fiber Art*" (first edition 1998) were organized by the Municipality of Chieri. The role of the Gallery "Il Quadrato" for the promotion of engraving, should also be mentioned.

People and work. The twentieth-century

At the beginning of the twentieth century the inhabitants of Chieri numbered 13,803. This would increase to 15,000 people by 1950. From the beginning of the 1960's the mass migration of people from the south to the industrialized towns in the North saw the population double (30,511 in 1971). Most of them were employed in the textile manufacturing industry. In 1971 there was a total of 206 textile factories. This number was destined to fall due to the eventual crises in this sector and today there are approximately ten that are still working.

Thanks to the migratory influx, mass urban development took place from 1956 to 1964, not all of it well-planned. One look at the view of the town from “La Rocca di San Giorgio” was enough to see that Chieri was no more “the town of red roofs” as it had been at the end of nineteenth-century.

Culture between the 1800's and the 1900's

On the 16th of September 1888, the original fund for what would become the Nicolò and Paola Francone Public Library of Chieri, was constituted. Within the ambit of the *Society for Welfare and Instruction*, a mutual aid society founded that same year with the aim of providing social assistance and promoting education, and which continued its activities until 1939, a public library was opened. The person behind this was an enthusiastic young university student, a liberal Catholic by the name of Nicolò Francone. Between the end of the 1800's and the beginning of the 1900's, Chieri saw a decisive passage from a predominantly agricultural and artisan economy to one of an industrial nature. From this new need to know and to know how, the shape of the library began to be articulated in various sectors: scholastic, popular, textbooks. The budding library was characterised in an original manner by the acquisition of two important legacies: the *Fondo Michele Sacerdote* in 1890 circa and the *Fondo Alberto Cornaglia* in 1918. They enriched the library with their ancient volumes published between XVI and the first half of the XIX century. Today the Nicolò Francone Room, which can be found in the Nicolò and Paola Francone Public Library of Chieri, holds around 7000 volumes of books, newspapers and articles from

that time.

The paintings of the 19th century

19th century Chieri cultural heritage is almost all housed between the walls of the Cathedral (the Duomo). The stations of the cross by Rocco Comaneggi date back to 1810 and the painting of "The Invention of the Sacred Cross" by Giovanni Vacca, to 1815. The general restoration of the Cathedral was achieved between 1874 and 1880 under the direction of Edoardo Arborio Mella and was carried out by some of the main artists of the Accademia Albertina of Turin (Andrea Gastaldi, Enrico Gamba and Gabrielle Ferrero). They were exponents of the "painting of history" and "prospective and architectonic painting" at that time.

In those same years a local-born Chieri painter, Alberto Maso Gilli became known and appreciated within Europe as an expert in medieval furnishings and above all as an engraver. Some of his works are kept in the town hall and in San Giorgio, in the female orphanage and the Annunziata churches. Recently a consortium has purchased and brought back to Chieri four of his paintings with views of the town.

The city of Chieri in the nineteenth century

In the nineteenth century the aristocracy was in decline and sold their properties to the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie. The presence of numerous workers in local factories favoured the birth of the "*Societies of Mutual Aid*" (*Società di Mutuo Soccorso*). In 1861 the Kingdom of Italy was born. The "*Technical Institute*" and the "*Liceo-Ginnasio*" (Grammar School) were opened. Among the most important manufacturers were the following: the Ramella ,Tabasso, Fasano and the Gallina families. Many workers attended the school of the "*Società di Previdenza e Istruzione*"; (the Society for Welfare and Instruction). In 1888 Nicolò Francone opened the library and founded the weekly newspaper "L'Arco". The town saw notable economic development. It had many taverns, workshops and a flourishing marketplace. The churches of "*San Domenico*", "*San Giorgio*" and the "*Duomo*" were restored. The Salesian priests of Don Bosco, the Benedictine nuns and the priests of the Mission made their homes in Chieri. From 1820 to 1949 the seminary also took residency in the town. In 1848 the Jewish ghetto was abolished. The scholars Cibrario, Montù and Bosio narrate the history of Chieri.

The Urban transformation of the nineteenth century

The Napoleonic occupation in Piedmont brings many changes to the administration including the abolition of convents which were bought and sold by the government. They became hospitals

and barracks and some of the churches were demolished (Sant'Agostino, San Francesco and Sant'Andrea). In the monastery of Santa Clara the textile factory of the Levi family was installed.

With the advent of the Restoration, industrial development continued and the town modernized thanks to the "*Regolamento d'Ornato*" (ornamentation regulations) in 1838.

Following the demolition of the city gates, the expansion of inhabited areas occurred: avenues around the city walls were built and an expansion southward was planned.

In 1784 the railway to Trofarello was built. The (current) cemetery and the public slaughterhouse were established and gas lighting for illumination was installed. New theatres were opened: Capella theatre (nowadays the *Splendor cinema*) and the Garibaldi and Margherita theatres. Industrial building was still modest but production activities attracted many people from the countryside.