



Palazzo

COMUNALE

Town Hall

Imola



HISTORY

The Palazzo Comunale (Town Hall) is located in the city centre, at the intersection of the *cardo* (now Via Appia and Via Mazzini) and the *decumanus* (now Via Emilia) of the ancient Roman layout and faces three squares: Matteotti, Caduti per la Libertà and Gramsci. It was built in the early thirteenth century by order of the municipal magistrates, formed a century earlier, to provide a suitable location for the execution of government functions that at the same time would become a symbol of civil power. In 1210, the first lots were purchased for the construction, on the corner of what now are Via Emilia and Via Mazzini, and as early as 1214 a public act was signed under the portico of the building. Until then the General Public Council (Arengo) had used the cemetery and the cloister of the ancient city parish church of San Lorenzo, which stood next to the municipal building at the intersection of the Via Mazzini and Via Aldrovandi. The facade and the entrance to the church faced the current Piazza Gramsci, while the apse and the cemetery occupied almost the entire south side of present-day Piazza Matteotti. The north side, however, was formerly occupied by private buildings, which the local government bought and demolished



Detail of the Main Square in front of the Town Hall



a few years after the first construction of the building, leading to the creation of the public square. The first major expansion of the Palazzo Comunale occurred with the purchase of private property, including the house-tower of the nobleman Cacciaguerra dei Marescotti (1230) located at the intersection of Via Emilia and Via Appia. The Marescotti tower became the first city tower and the building became the “Palazzo nuovo” for the Municipality, while the other was henceforth referred to as “Palazzo vecchio”. As early as 1255 the two sites were connected by a bridge on Via Emilia, perhaps covered



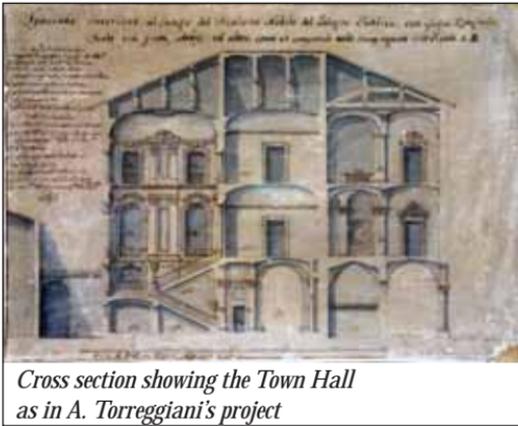
Old municipal tower

by a canopy.

In the Middle Ages the “Palazzo vecchio”, or “maggiore” (superior), was smaller than the current building. It was the seat of the Podestà, the General Council and the magistrates who administered justice. Luxury fabric and cloth workshops were located in the premises on the ground floor, under the portico along Via Emilia. The upper floor was reached by a flight of steps located on the side of the square, surmounted by a small balcony used for the declamation of announcements.

Following the riots that broke out in the years of

the definitive rise to power of the Alidosiana Lords (1334-1365) the “Palazzo vecchio” suffered damage which rendered it unusable from 1365 to 1381. Subsequently the Alidosi, who also established their city residence in the building, undertook major renovations: the elevation of a floor, the coverage of the bridge on Via Emilia and the acquisition of a building across from Via Mazzini, where a second entrance to the building was opened. The connection of two buildings came with the construction of a second vault above Via Mazzini.



From the beginning of the fourteenth century, the “Palazzo nuovo” became the seat of the newly formed public judiciary of Bologna. On the ground floor, under the portico along Via Appia, there were fabric, meat

and cheese shops. In the innermost rooms were the prisons, documented as early as the thirteenth century, which were the only ones in the city until the early sixteenth century when the Rocca Sforzesca (Sforzesca Rock) was also transformed into a prison. The “Palazzo nuovo” was remodelled during the rule of the Taddeo Manfredi lords, who resided there between 1448 and 1471, but was not unified until 1502, as the various buildings are still separated on a map of Imola drawn between 1472-1473 by the engineer Sforza Danesio Maineri and perfected by Leonardo da Vinci.

After centuries of neglect the building was renovated radically in the second half of the eighteenth century, to assume its current appearance. In 1745 the decision was made to extend the staircase and in 1750 the City Council commissioned the project to the architect Alfonso Torreggiani; the second project presented in 1754 was approved. Construction began in November of that year, but work proceeded slowly due to high costs, stopping altogether after the death of Torreggiani (1764). The interruption to the work lasted until 1768 when the task of proceeding was entrusted to Cosimo Morelli, appointed by Pope Pius VI as the architect of the Papal Legations. Morelli modified the Torreggiani plans and brought the work to a conclusion in 1771. The interventions included the elevation of the roof, the creation of the grand staircase and rooms on the main floor, the rebuilding of the vault on Via Mazzini, the windows overlooking Via Emilia and the façade on piazza Matteotti. New work to restore the interiors was undertaken in the second half of the nineteenth century.



EXTERIOR

The visit starts in the centre of the city, under the nineteenth-century clock, a traditional meeting point for the residents of Imola, where you can admire the entire extent of the building. The current municipal tower replaces the medieval one that stood on the corner opposite Via Emilia and that was about 60 meters high, with a clock and three bells. The first tower collapsed on January 20, 1553 and its ruins remained scattered on the square for many decades. At the base of the vault, on the corner between Via Emilia and Via Appia, there is a curious testimony of medieval life: the measurements units of tiles and bricks are carved and sculpted in the stone. Traces of the first building are visible on the wall of the “Palazzo vecchio” along the Via Emilia: the remains of four lancet windows and a cornice that was the foundation of the original battlements. Under the portico you can admire grey sandstone capitals with zoomorphic and anthropomorphic motifs. Originally, the “Palazzo vecchio” was crowned with dovetail Ghibelline battlements, elements that marked the alliance of the city to the Emperor Frederick II, agreed in the years of construction of the building. In 1598, the vault on Via Emilia was decorated with frescoes depicting four scenes of the life of Pope Clement VIII, commissioned to the painter Bartolomeo Cesi on occasion of the Pope’s visit to Imola. The four scenes were: the appointment as Pope of Cardinal Ippolito Aldobrandini (1592), Henry IV, King of France (1596) at the feet of the Pope; the Pope conquers Ferrara without a battle (1597); the Pope promotes peace between Henry IV, King of France and Philip II, King of Spain (1598). Unfortunately, the frescoes were lost



External façade looking onto Matteotti square

in 1845 during the restoration of the vault. Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the vault was also used for public hangings, which took place at the window facing Bologna.



FACADE

The external facade on Piazza Matteotti, work of the series of restorations in the second half of the eighteenth century, consists of a front on three floors. Looking at the development of the windows you can form an idea as to how the front over the square would have appeared before the creation of the current facade: starting from Via Emilia, the first five windows correspond to the extension of the medieval “Palazzo vecchio”; the next four to the rectory of the first church of San Lorenzo, which was demolished in 1480 by Girolamo Riario, Lord of Imola and husband of Caterina Sforza and the last two to the second church of San Lorenzo, which was rebuilt in 1500 at the behest of the Pope and deconsecrated in 1805. Remains of the masonry structure of the tower are still visible in the inner courtyard of the building. The entrance, which is asymmetric, is a round portal, adorned by four columns with a cornered base and Ionic capitals, on which an undulating balcony rests. At the sides of the window in two niches are the paintings of the town’s patron saints, Cassiano and Pier Grisologo, painted by Gaspare Bigari. The paintings were commissioned in 1774 by Agostino Troni of Imola, with



External facade looking onto Matteotti square

a bequest that the facade be adorned with a statue of the Madonna and Child. Indeed, a statue carved in 1723 by Domenico Trifogli or, according to some, by the same Faenza

sculptors who created the balcony, was placed above the window. Every year, on the day of the Immaculate Conception (8 December), the Fire Department of Imola lay a bouquet of flowers at the foot of the statue. Of interest is the fact that on 15 April 1798, during the period of French rule, a patriotic lunch was organized in the square and a fountain of wine was opened on the facade of the town hall that could be tapped by all citizens.



ENTRANCE HALL

Entering from the portal, you reach the building's entrance hall, decorated with numerous commemorative stones in memory of historical events and famous figures. To the right is a plaque stone dedicated to Giuseppe Mazzini, a counterpart to the one named after Giuseppe Garibaldi, located on the same wall but on the other side, both presented 8 June 1884 in the presence of Andrea Costa from Imola, the first socialist member of Parliament. On the wall next to the Via Mazzini entrance a fragment of an ogival arch is visible, proof of the fact that the first construction on the Via Emilia of the Town Hall was further back than its present location.

MONUMENTAL STAIRCASE

Leading from the entrance hall is the monumental staircase, the work of Cosimo Morelli. Unlike the original design of Torreggiani, the staircase has a more rigorous, yet beautiful and elegant style. It was built also using a portion of the funds from the sale of the Public Armoury. It has marble steps and is decorated with lesenes with stucco capitals, while the walls feature commemorative stones, inscriptions and busts in memory of important events in the history of the city, including the visit of King Umberto



Monumental staircase

I of Savoy in 1888 and the end of the First World War. The design of the staircase reflects an architectural model widely used at the time in both public and private buildings: in Imola it is featured in the stairs of the public library, of Palazzo Tozzoni (Tozzoni Palace) and Palazzo Vescovile (Archbishop's Palace). The staircase is accessible only on special occasions or during weddings, but is visible from the corridor of the first floor or by looking out of a window that opens in the stairwell-lift.



ENTRANCE ROOMS

The stairs to the first floor leads to the two adjoining entrance rooms.

“**Sala dei capitani**” (Hall of the Captains) so named for its two large canvases located within, both the work of unknown artists and dating back to the sixteenth century, depicting two military men from Imola: Scipione Carradori, captain of Charlemagne, and Taddeo della Volpe (1474-1534), captain of the militia of the Republic of Venice. The table is in the Renaissance style and the benches date back to the eighteenth century.

At the back of the “**Sala del gonfalone**” (Hall of the banner) or “**Sala del balcone**” (Hall of the balcony) stands a large curtain painted with the coat of arms of the City of Imola, in an earlier version than the current one. The coat of arms is a shield divided into three parts: one of the two vertical sections has a blue background (sign of nobility, justice, loyalty and good reputation) featuring the word “LIBERTAS”, the other is red (symbol of the blood shed in battle, bravery, valour and supremacy) and features a griffin crowned in gold gripping a silver sword in one paw. The griffin is a chimerical figure with the wings and front legs of an eagle, horse ears, and the tail and hind legs of a lion: elements that symbolize the protection, vigilance, speed and strength of the Imola community whilst the sword represents its combative nature. Above the two vertical sections is an ancient acknowledgement granted to the city, the Capo d’Angiò, a heraldry label with three golden lilies, and a golden crown with eight open doors or posterns, five of which are visible, and on the double ridge, eight towers, of which five are visible. In 1990 Imola was granted the title of “city” and the olive branches and twisted oak tied by a tri-colour ribbon were added. On the side walls of the room two imposing marble plaques face each other that commemorate the return from Vienna by Pope Pius VI (May 28, 1782) and the return from France of Pope Pius VII (April 4, 1814), both of which are surmounted by the family coat of arms of the popes. The door frames are decorated in stucco, with festoons and faces of women.





CHAPEL

You then cross the central office, which was the ancient “**Antechamber**” for the podestà hearings. The ceiling was painted in 1793 by Antonio Villa and Angelo Gottarelli, with the centre featuring allegories of Empire, in military dress, and of Religion, with tiara, crossed keys, the Ten Commandments and dove. At the base of the square there are four panes with historical events.

Opening a door opposite the counter of the central office, you enter the “**Cappella del magistrato**” (Chapel of the magistrate), also decorated by Villa and Gottarelli in the same year. The existence of a chapel in the building was first documented in 1289. Initially it was located in the “Palazzo nuovo”. The Chapel, officially opened in 1584, was consecrated on September 1, 1614 in the name of the assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Cassiano and Saint Pier Grisologo, protectors of the city. With the eighteenth-century renovation of the building, the chapel was sited where it is today. Until 1860 the municipal administration maintained a chaplain for the performance of religious duties. Today the room is used for City Council meetings. The walls of the chapel are monochrome, with faux architecture, decorated with candelabras and grotesque figures and faux recessed statues of the protectors of the city. From the left are the saints Cornelio, Proietto, Maurelio, Biagio and Terenzio and the consecrated Pietro Passeri. Between Saint Proietto and Saint Maurelio there was once an altar that was removed. Today a copy of the altarpiece remains with “La Madonna di Ponte Santo” by Lavinia Fontana, who was commissioned as the artist for the municipal



Chapel – photographed by Sergio Orselli

magistracy in 1583, while the original is preserved in the city art Collections, at the Saint Domenico Museum. “Ponte



rotto” was the ancient name of the current village of Pontesanto, which changed its name a few years ago in tribute to a miraculous image of the Virgin Mary that is venerated there. The city of Imola is depicted at the foot of the saints, recognisable by the profile of the buildings, including the Rocca Sforzesca (Sforzesca Rock). On the opposite wall, in front of the altar, there is a grate that at one time connected with a room from which proceedings

could be listened to. Above the grate, a tempera on the wall represents the citizens of Imola that invoke the Virgin Mary to end the plague. The plague to which the painting refers is the one that devastated the city between 1630 and 1632, killing about a third of the population. Imola is in the background, seen from the southern walls, from the banks of the River Santerno, where the victims of the plague were buried.



MAGISTRATE'S APARTMENT

Returning to the central office, you enter in the rooms that constitute the “**Appartamento del magistrato**” (Magistrate’s Apartment), the jewel in the crown of the building. The rooms were decorated in 1777 by Alessandro Della Nave, from Imola, an expert in perspective quadratura, and by Giacomo Zampa, from Forlì, who created the figures. An iconographic representation was created inspired by the qualities of good governance: justice, prudence and wisdom, personified by three allegorical figures. Della Nave was a part of the established group of artists that, in those years, worked in Imola in the decoration of many private and important public buildings in collaboration with architect Cosimo Morelli, including the municipal library, with the artist Antonio Villa, and the pharmacy of the hospital of Santa Maria della Scaletta, with the artist Angelo Gottarelli. The ceilings are enriched with eighteenth-century Murano glass chandeliers.



Fireplace Room - photographed by Sergio Orselli



“Sala del caminetto” (Fireplace Room) - The vault opens towards the sky where the figure of Justice flies, symbolized by the sword and the scales. The base consists of a faux balustrade, with the handrails covered in blue and yellow drapes and red cushions, behind which there are faux windows. The four corners feature painted relief cameos with the profiles of illustrious Imola residents: Benvenuto Rambaldi, Marc’Antonio Flaminio, Alessandro Tartagni and Giovanni da Imola. On the main wall there is a fireplace, on which stands a Rococo mirror with painted and gilded stucco decorations. On the opposite wall is a marble plaque from 1858 that commemorates a visit to the city of Imola by Pope Pius IX in 1857: the bust of the Pope is carved in profile within a medallion. In the room you can admire a number of eighteenth-century palanquins, used to carry *Gonfaloniere* and magistrates, and a silver *Gonfaloniere* bat of the Municipality of Imola from 1619.

“Sala rossa” (Red Room) or **“Sala dei matrimoni”** (Wedding Room) - The ceiling bursts through a sky full of clouds, in which floats the allegory of Prudence, symbolised by a convex



Wedding Room - photographed by Sergio Orselli



mirror, a snake, that represents conscience, and by a rope, the symbol of deceit. On the base of the vault are painted medallions, held by cherubs and surrounded by blue drapes that frame faux reliefs with allegories of the qualities of good governance (public happiness, love of country, vigilance, justice). Brocade-covered walls and the wooden floor are refined aesthetic but also practical choices, particularly as a protection against the cold. The fireplace is surmounted by a mirror decorated with a grotesque motif in gilded stucco, which features two griffins. On the right is a nineteenth-century copy of the painting the massacre of the innocents by the Bolognese painter Guido Reni, the seventeenth-century original is housed in the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna. To the left is a copy of the famous thirteenth-century fresco of the annunciation of the basilica of the Annunziata di Firenze. Legend has it that the face of the Virgin Mary in the original fresco was painted by an angel; in Florence the image is still revered by young married couples who, after the wedding, bequeath a bouquet of flowers in return for a long and happy married life. The painting is signed by Alessandro Allori and dated 1605, as testified by the inscription on the canvas itself. The armchairs and the two consoles are in Louis XVI style.

“**Sala gialla**” (Yellow Room) – At the centre of the faux coffered dome painted on the ceiling is suspended the figure of Wisdom, symbolized by a torch, an open book and a few wreaths of laurel and oak in the hands of a boy. The base



Yellow Room - photographed by Sergio Orselli

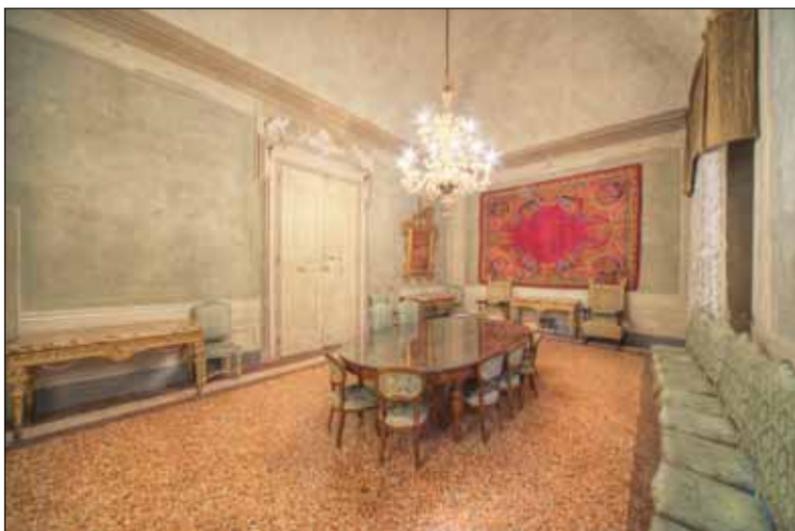
of the vault is decorated with four faux monochrome reliefs depicting episodes from ancient history: Julius Caesar greets his mother before his election as *Pontifex Maximus*, Croesus questions



Solon, Pompey enters the temple of Jerusalem, Sardanapalus burns his concubines and his treasures. In the four pendentives the vault is broken, and through arcaded arches, opens up towards scenes set against faux classical architecture. The arts and sciences are allegorically represented in each of these four scenes: painting with drawing and poetry, arithmetic and mathematics, astronomy and architecture. The mirrors are of the eighteenth century and some of the furniture is in the Empire style. On the desk are shown two of the symbolic keys to the city, an urn for the election of the magistrate and ancient official seals.

COUNCIL ROOM

Returning to the first room, you exit by the door on the bottom and through the “Sala del gonfalone” enter the antechamber of the council chamber, the so-called “**Sala verde**” (Green Room), which in 1945 was the office of Imola National Liberation Committee (CLN). The room is enriched by the presence of four large armchairs from the seventeenth century, a golden frame in the Rococo style and three consoles in the style of Louis XVI. The “**Sala del Consiglio**” (Council Room) is rectangular and “animated” by the flow of a balustrade at about 6 feet high along the entire perimeter. The walls are decorated by busts of illustrious Imola politicians, such as Andrea Costa, Giovanni Codronchi Argeli, Giuseppe



Green Room - photographed by Sergio Orselli



Scarabelli and Anselmo Marabini, and the plaque dedicated to Francesco Alberghetti, physician and philanthropist from Imola, carved in 1859 by Cincinnato Baruzzi also from Imola, a student of Antonio Canova. Of interest is the fact that from 1798 to 1810 this room temporarily became the city's theatre when with the arrival of the French in 1797, a fire destroyed the Teatro dei Cavalieri Associati (built by Cosimo Morelli between 1775 and 1782, in an area east of Port'Appia). In the council chamber a wooden structure with 44 stages over three floors was constructed, as well as a gallery with benches for members of the public who could not afford box seats. The structure was demolished in 1807 because it was feared that fire could destroy the nearby municipal archives, in which were stored all the official documents of the municipality. In 1812 a new theatre was opened in the upper church of the former convent of San Francesco. Made by a group of Imola citizens, i Signori Associati, it was sold to the city in 1846. In the Council Room the City Council still meets today.



Council Room - photographed by Sergio Orselli

PALAZZO COMUNALE

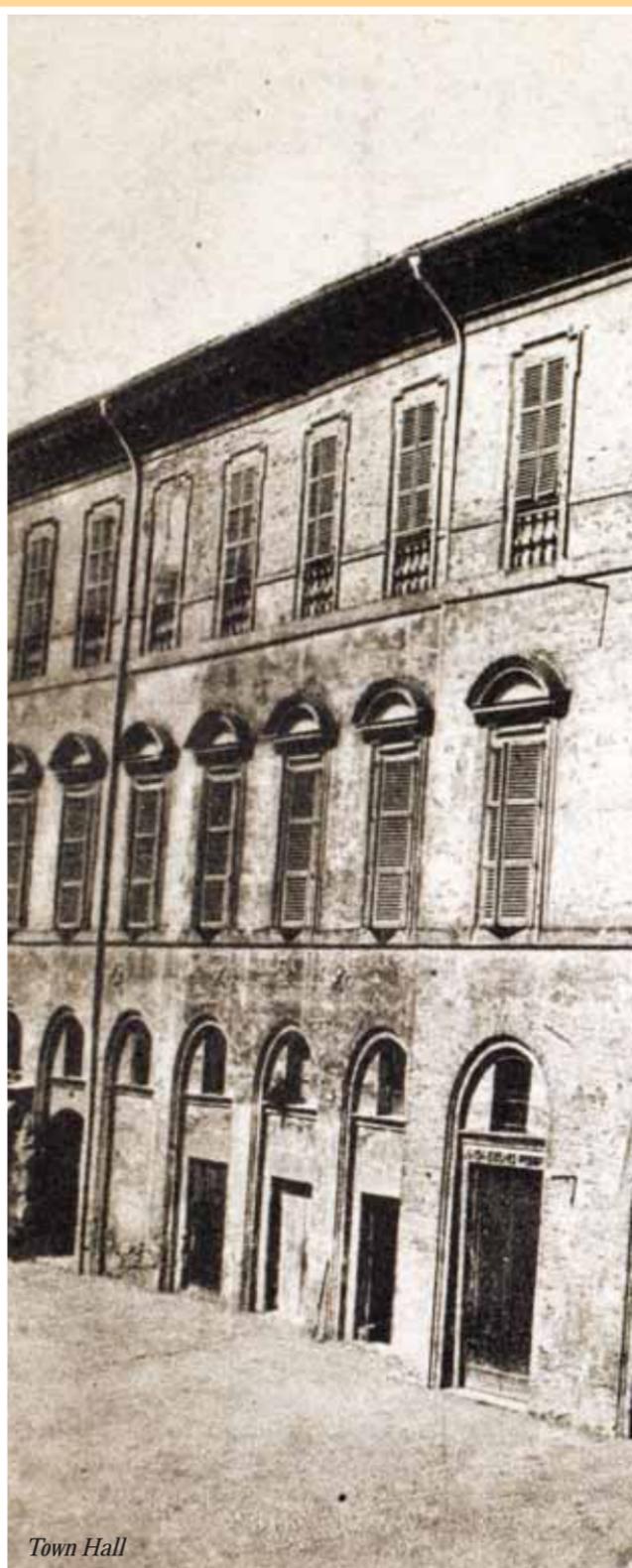
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Visits upon appointment



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