

Street Names

In our home countries we hardly ever note the names of the streets we walk and drive in, and the same happens here in Perugia which, like all cities, has a mixture of street names: some banal, some significant, and some even downright interesting. The banal we'll leave out but the significant and interesting we've taken the time to research. The first eight names are connected to the event of the unification of Italy (1848-1871), while the rest are just those that caught our fancy. Should you be so strange as to want to know more, we recommend *Caro Viario* (available at La Libreria in Via Oberdan), which describes the history of all the streets in the historic center.

Via Mazzini – One of the trio of names (the next two are the others) that will appear in almost every Italian city, Mazzini was one of the intellectuals who started the Risorgimento, the fight for Italian unity. He was a staunch republican and was disappointed when Italy was united under a king.

Corso Cavour – Count Cavour was the Prime Minister of Piedmont (ruled by the Savoy family), the region that ultimately united Italy (or annexed the South, as some southern Italians say). He was responsible for coordinating the Piedmontese efforts against France, Austria, and the Bourbons, and he financed in part Garibaldi's invasion.

Corso Garibaldi – Giuseppe Garibaldi was the swashbuckling hero who invaded Sicily (at that time under the Bourbon kings who ruled everything up to Naples) with his thousand Red Shirts. While he was a republican, he wanted to see Italy united and so, after defeating the Bourbon troops, he delivered the South to the Piedmontese king, Victor Emmanuel II.

Via Oberdan and Via Cesare Battisti – Two minor figures in the unification of Italy whom everyone has forgotten (though Battisti was footnote in my thesis on Alto Adige). Guglielmo Oberdan was put to death in 1882 for plotting to assassinate Emperor Franz Josef of the Hapsburgs.

Borgo XX Giugno - Spin the clock back to 1859. Italy is falling to the Republicans and the Papal States are under enormous political and military pressure. A group of local patriots on 14 June give the Papal representative, Monsignor Antonelli, a week in which to leave the city. Antonelli pleads for help from the Vatican while Perugians seek support from elsewhere in Italy including Cavour in Torino. From Arezzo arrive four hundred old rifles, of which two hundred and eighty can be put into the hands of gallant volunteers and crusty farmers. On 20 June, the Papal troops advance up the valley and attack the barricades near the Church of San Pietro. The two and a half hour battle brings about twenty-five casualties, after which the Swiss and Austrian troops loyal to the Pope sack the city. The Papal Army is reported to have thrown people out of buildings after stripping them of their valuables. Foreigners trapped in Perugia send news of the pillaging to the American ambassador and *The Times* newspaper in London, after which public sentiment in Europe turns radically against the Pope. Some of the defenders of Perugia in this battle, such as Guardabassi, Faina, Annibale Vecchi and Danzetta, are honoured with place names around the city.

Via XIV Settembre - The date commemorates the liberation of Perugia by revolutionary forces in 1860.

Corso Bersaglieri - Republican infantrymen (*bersaglieri*) entered Perugia on 14 September 1860 through Porta Sant'Antonio and approached the city along this street.

Via Bontempi and Piazza Baldassarre Ferri - Giovanni Andrea Angelini Bontempi had enough talent (and names) to become a famous court musician in Dresden in the late 1600's. He composed the operas *Paride*, *Dafne* and *Jupiter*. Like Bontempi, Baldassarre Ferri was a singer famous throughout Europe in the seventeenth century. Yeah, and despite the fact that the practice was already illegal, both were castrated (ouch! in fact double ouch!!) to preserve the early promise of their voices. Ferri was given as a present (!) to Catherine of Sweden and then the King of Poland before returning to Perugia via Vienna to sing out his last days in the Church of San Filippo Neri (go down Via Dei Priori, it's on the right). Bontempi was sympathetic to the Jesuits and often used his spare cash to buy up anti-Jesuit books and destroy them. Both, predictably, had problems finding heirs for their wealth.

Piazza Morlacchi - Francesco Morlacchi was a composer whose works were performed in Florence, Milan and Germany in the early 19th century. Perugia's Conservatory of Music is dedicated to him.

Piazza Danti - Vincenzo Danti cast the bronze statue of Pope Julius III for Perugia's cathedral. Other works of this 16th century sculptor are to be found in the museums and churches of Florence. For more interesting stuff about the Dantis, look in Alan's *A Guided Tour Of The Bizarre And Useless* in this section.

Piazza IV Novembre – The center of ancient Perugia, this piazza was known in the Middle Ages by the clever name “Piazza Grande.” The fourth of November 1918 was the armistice between Austria and Italy and thereby the end of the First World War for Italy.

Via della Viola - Possibly named after a ledge of flower pots kept by a lady who loved the colour...violet. In any event a beautiful medieval street with a perfect sidestreet-piazzetta waiting to be redone (Via San Giovanni del Fosso).

Corso Vannucci - Pietro Vannucci was actually born in Citta` Della Pieve in 1450. He went on to become one of the great Italian painters of the fourteen hundreds. Better known as ‘Il Perugino’, he painted in most major cities in Italy and at the Vatican. Even though he had a workshop in Perugia where he both painted and tutored, including the young Raphael, not many of Perugino's works remain here. The most notable piece in situ is the one in the *Collegio del Cambio*, while other works are in the National Gallery.

Via del Melo - A number of streets in Perugia are named after trees. *Melo*, apple tree, is one of them. Several streets also take their designations from exotic animals once kept by the idle rich, such as Via dello Struzzo (Ostrich) and Via della Lupa Cieca (the Blind She-Wolf).

Porta Pesa - Meaning weighbridge in Italian, at Porta Pesa there was formerly a...my goodness, the place names committee has such a riotous imagination. Goods coming from the countryside were weighed here for tax purposes before being allowed to enter the city. Later on another weighbridge was established on the other side of town near where the Tre Archi now stands.

Piazza Fortebraccio - Braccio Fortebraccio, originally from Montone, was a reknowned headkicker of the fifteenth century. After once occupying the whole of Romagna, he defeated the Perugia forces in a seven-hour battle in 1416 and took control of the city. During his eight years as *signore* he improved the fortifications and did much to embellish Perugia. As the real power in what was theoretically the Papal Territories, Braccio was twice excommunicated by the Church before being badly wounded in an effort to conquer L'Acquila. He unwisely refused medical treatment and food, dying later the same day. He is described in Macchiavelli's *The Prince* as one of the men who were arbiters of the destiny of Italy.

Via del Porco - The Ranieri family had the “ancient right” to bring their two pigs up from Via del Porco to Piazza Matteotti, where the market was held until after the second World War. These living vacuum cleaners provided Perugia with a clean piazza each day and the Ranieris with *prosciutto* the whole year.