

ITALIAN CHAPEL



The interior of the Italian Chapel today

This chapel, "*The Miracle of Camp 60*", together with the statue of St George and the Dragon is all that now remains of Camp 60, or indeed any of the other construction sites of the Churchill Barriers, which were built between 1940 and 1945. The Italian Prisoners of War of Camp 60, who arrived in January 1942 to help build the Churchill Barriers, left behind an unusual memorial

to the war, the Italian Chapel on Lamb Holm.

To brighten up the cheerless camp of Nissen huts the Italians made paths with the one thing they had in abundance, concrete, and planted flowerbeds. Domenico Chiocchetti made the statue from barbed wire and cement, to preside over the camp square. According to Bruno Volpi, "*It depicts the patron*

saint of soldiers, St George, about to kill the dragon, which represents evil. It symbolises a will to "kill" all misunderstandings among people of different cultures."

The prisoners soon had a theatre and a recreational hut complete with a concrete billiard table, but they lacked a chapel. In late 1943 the new commandant, Major Buckley, with the encouragement of

St George and the Dragon in 1944



Chiocchetti and Palumbo



the padre Father Giacobazzi and Domenico Chiocchetti, had two Nissen huts joined end to end and the latter set to work, aided by a small number of other POWs. One end was to be the Chapel, the other a school.

One end of the corrugated iron hut was lined with plasterboard and an altar with altar-rail cast in concrete. Chiocchetti painted the Madonna and Child behind the altar which is based on a 19th century painting by Nicolo Barabino inspired by a card his mother had given to him when he left home in Moena for the war.

He also frescoed a White Dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit, at the centre of the vault and included the symbols of the four Evangelists around it, as well as two Cherubim and two Seraphim lower down, all from the card, which he kept throughout the war.

Proud Italians pose outside their Chapel



ACROSS THE CHURCHILL BARRIERS



The Italian Chapel and Churchill Barrier No.1 across Kirk Sound

This was so successful that more plasterboard and artistic help was procured and the whole of the hut was lined and then decorated. The upper parts appear like brick with vaulting, while the lower walls are painted to look like carved marble. The "vaults" in the ceiling are especially well executed, and the visual effect is quite stunning.

Palumbo, a metalworker, made candelabra and the rood screen and gates. After all this work the outside seemed mean and so a concrete

façade was erected with the help of Bruttapasta, with an archway and pillars. A belfry was mounted on top and a moulded head of Christ in red clay was placed on the front of the arch. The whole exterior of the hut was then covered with a thick coat of cement, never in short supply at Lambholm in 1944!

Chiocchetti had remained behind for several weeks in 1945 to finish the font, and returned to Orkney in 1960 after being sought out by the



The Chapel was in use from 1944

The Chapel in 1945



ITALIAN CHAPEL



Visiting Italian ex-POWs in 1992

BBC, when he did much to restore the internal paintwork of the chapel. In 1961 his hometown, Moena, near Bolzano in the Dolomites, gifted a wayside shrine, a carved figure of Christ erected outside the Chapel, to the people of Orkney. More recently much exterior work has been done to restore and preserve the Chapel and the memorial statue for the future.

St George and the Dragon today



The Italian Chapel is now one of the most-visited monuments in Orkney and is a fitting memorial to those lost in wartime. Orkney's sites span at least 6,000 years from the Neolithic to the present and the Chapel provides a sharp contrast to the older ones. Chiocchetti, in addressing the Orcadian people, said, "The chapel is yours - for you to love and preserve. I take with me to Italy the remembrance

of your kindness and wonderful hospitality. I shall remember you always, and my children shall learn from me to love you. I thank (you)...for having given me the joy of seeing again the little chapel of Lambholm where I, in leaving, leave a part of my heart."

In recent years several of the ex-prisoners and their families have returned to visit their chapel. In 1992 a small group came on the 50th anniversary of their arrival on Lamb Holm. Sandra Tait spoke in Italian, "We welcome you on your return to the chapel which we all love and admire - this little bit of Italy and of the Catholic Church implanted in our hearts in Orkney".

Bruno Volpi, explained "What is it that made POWs work so feverishly with partially or totally inadequate means at their disposal? It was the wish to show to oneself first, and to the world then, that in spite of being trapped in a barbed wire camp, down in spirit, physically and morally deprived of many things, one could still find something inside which could be set free."

"People cannot be judged by their precarious situations. Their culture, spirit and will to express themselves in creative thoughts and deeds are stronger than any limitation to freedom. This is the spirit that gave birth to the works of art on Lamb Holm."

ACROSS THE CHURCHILL BARRIERS



The exterior of the Italian Chapel today

In 1995, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Barriers, a further group returned and a reception was held in their honour by Orkney Islands Council. Hopefully this connection between Italy and Orkney will endure long after memories of World War II have faded. Cultural links such as school exchanges and visits by individuals and families as well as musicians are contributing to this.

Domenico Chiocchetti died in Moena in May 1999. A memorial service was conducted at the chapel by the then Bishop Mario Conti which was attended by many Orcadians as well as his wife, Maria, their son and two daughters. It is somewhat ironic that most of the many visitors to Orkney cross the Churchill Barriers. They come not to remember the English war leader, or to marvel at military engineering, but to visit our little Italian

shrine, which is a monument to hope and faith in exile.



Chiocchetti at work in 1960

Sandra with visiting ex-POWs in 1995 at Water Sound



The Chiocchetti family at the Italian Chapel in 1999

