



The International Trust for Croatian Monuments

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PROGRESS REPORT

August 2020

Visit to Zagreb and Split February/March 2020

My last year's report was written and sent to our supporters during August/early September 2019. On 16th September last year our dear friend and trustee, Peter Stormonth Darling, suddenly died. This was not recorded in my last year's report and I regret this. I did put a notice on our website, www.croatianmonuments.org, immediately.

We miss Peter enormously. He was a close family friend of many years and a great supporter of our Trust. When Henry, my husband, died in 2013, Peter sent to the Trust funds to do something in Croatia in memory of Henry. Years flew by, to my great regret, I never managed to do something. When Sherban Cantacuzino and John Julius Norwich, our trustees since 1991, died in 2018, Peter very kindly added to his donation. And now we are doing something, in memory of Peter, Sherban, John Julius and Henry.

It is a very worthwhile project. The Franciscan friary of St Anthony at Poljud in Split holds important collections of old historic documents of every description, Papal Bulls, incunabula, prints and drawings, early books. Among them, they hold the literary heritage of Marko Marulić, 1450 – 1524, humanist and writer from Split, who was read all over the world, including Great Britain. King Henry VIII owned a copy of his Evangelistery, a seven-book treatise on Christian ethics, which the King annotated himself. This copy is now held in the British Library. We are now, with help from the friary and conservators at Split, going to make sure that these important collections are going to be safely preserved for generations to come. It is one thousand years since the foundation of the first church in this location, dedicated to St Mary.

A "Study Room", airy and comfortable, with lovely views over the cloister, has been identified in the friary, which will be dedicated to Henry, Sherban, John Julius and Peter. All works are financed by our Trust. Complete restoration of the space, with everything new, including flooring, and the purchase of the state-of-the-art furniture and equipment for the safe preservation of these collections. This includes all the necessary measuring instruments for humidity, fire, theft. Work is going on at present, all of it under the careful supervision of the Ministry of Culture, Conservation Department at Split, in close cooperation with the custodian of the friary, Fra Anselmo Stulić, and Fra Bernardin Škunca. The Study Room will also hold books dated to the end of 16th century.

This Study Room will be open to researches and public alike. Apart from conservation cupboards and chests, there will be several pieces of antique furniture which the friary holds, a writing table, a vitrine, which we are also restoring, pleasant lighting, a cross and some paintings on the wall. Maybe even the Lorenzo Lotto portrait of Bishop Tomo Nigris will be placed there, as conditions in the room will be under best control. It will be a welcoming place to come and work in or just to visit and enjoy. It will be a great pleasure for all of us when the project is finished and a fitting memorial to Henry, Sherban, John Julius and Peter who have done so much to help Croatia in her hour of need. A stone plaque, carved by Marin Barišić, one of our ex-students in stone conservation, will be placed on the wall recording their names.

Here, I can only repeat my infinite thanks for the unfailing support of these wonderful people who made the work of our Trust so much easier and more successful.

In December 2019 Anna Somers Cocks, OBE, became our trustee. Anna established The Art Newspaper in 1991 and in the 1990s her newspaper regularly reported on damage caused to the cultural heritage of Croatia. I have known Anna all these years and I am most grateful that she has agreed to become a trustee. I hope that with Anna and Timothy Clifford we shall be able to do something for Croatia which will strengthen the relations between our two countries and bring to the public knowledge some important elements of Croatia's European heritage.

Croatia has suffered again. Its capital city, Zagreb, was struck by a strong earthquake on 22nd March. It happened at 6.30 in the morning, on a Sunday. Due to the corona virus, not many people were out and about, especially not in churches, which would normally have worshippers and clergy even at that early hour. Many churches were affected, including the Cathedral. Museums suffered and people had their homes destroyed or badly damaged. It will take great efforts to restore the damage and rebuild. It is the ordinary people who are finding it particularly hard, especially those who had to leave their homes. They have no prospects of funding coming from some European source, which the museums do, nor are they able to finance the repairs themselves.

All of this, in the middle of the corona crises. It has been very hard for everyone in Zagreb, especially so for conservators/restorers who had faced destruction 30 years ago and again now. Still today Zagreb carries signs of its recent tragedy. The city trams were affected, and they did not run normally, with tram lines dislodged and uprooted, cranes still everywhere, piles of rubbish, abandoned cars. The earth still trembles, and the people are afraid. In all this destruction, however, only one life was lost and that was of a little girl aged 15, hurt in her own home. I cannot express my sadness and deep feelings for this little girl's family.

A strange quirk of fate. When Zagreb suffered a much stronger earthquake in 1880, when much of the town had to be rebuilt, the Zagreb Cathedral suffered too, as it has now in this recent earthquake. In 1880, three fragments of a tombstone emerged in the dislodged floor of the Cathedral and this time, under the rubble and mortar in the apse, four more fragments of a stone bearing an inscription were found. A relief of a lying person was revealed. Having deciphered the Latin inscription, it became clear that this was the tombstone monument to a Zagreb Bishop, Lucas Baratin, who headed the diocese between 1500 and 1510. In the history of Zagreb, Lucas Baratin is remembered not only as a great patron of the arts, but also as the builder of fortifications encompassing the Cathedral and the Bishop's Palace against Ottoman attacks.

The three fragments found in 1880 have been the subject of many studies, as all concerned think that this is the most beautiful piece of Renaissance sculpture in Continental Croatia. In earlier literature, the sculpture was attributed to Ivan Duknović (Johannes Dalmata) of Trogir, 1440 – 1514, and then to John of Florence (Johannes Fiorentinus), as on the tombstone there are remains of the sculptor's name, IOA(...)S ME FECIT. With the four more fragments found now, the scholarly research may lead to new discoveries.

A group of conservators approached our Trust immediately after the earthquake. I am very happy to be able to report that we were able to give "First Aid" to five museums in Zagreb, by supplying them with conservation boxes and other material, immediately, within a few days. The conservation firm, "Crescat", with which we have been dealing now for many years, delivered these necessary items even before they had received payment from us. The curators of museums were faced with their collections scattered on the floor, in bits and pieces, they needed to be carefully wrapped up and stored, awaiting either restoration or safe display. It was the Archaeological Museum, the Museum of Arts and Crafts, the Ethnographic Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art and the August Šenoa Museum which were the beneficiaries of our quick reaction.

There is no doubt that Zagreb will receive help from many quarters, as they already have, for example, from His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales.

As if the earthquake was not enough, during the night of 25th July, torrential rains engulfed Zagreb and most of the Lower Town was flooded. Museums, with their collections stored in basements awaiting better times, people who had also stored their belongings in basements while attending to their homes following the earthquake damage, found them under water. Valiant efforts were taken by city services and many individuals during that night and in the following days to save what could be saved. Thus,

with the corona virus still very much present, with the aftermath of the earthquake damage and now water, Zagreb and its people and its cultural institutions are facing a challenge of unprecedented proportions. We must wish them strength and luck!

I would like to record here my grateful thanks to The Art Newspaper for putting the news about the earthquake immediately on their web pages and to the Minerva Magazine for publishing an article on the damage caused to Zagreb in their July/August 2020 issue. I would also like to thank the Apollo Magazine for publishing an article by Sir Timothy Clifford about the earthquake on their web pages. More information is available on our website, www.croatianmonuments.org. I would also like to thank here the International Institute of Conservation for publishing in their August 2019 issue of "News in Conservation" an article on Research and Conservation of the Medieval Doors of Split Cathedral, by Žana Matulić Bilač. They also very kindly published an article about the earthquake by Mirta Pavić, from the Museum of Contemporary Art, in their April/May 2020 issue. These articles can also be viewed on our website.

On my last visit to Zagreb, earlier this spring, I was lucky to miss the earthquake and to return to my home in London just before all the restrictions were put in place. While in Croatia, I visited Split, by kindness of a friend, Mario Braun, who had just retired after many years at the Croatian Conservation Institute. Mario took me to Split and back in his own car, as travelling on public transport was already becoming questionable. Apart from the visit to the Franciscans, because I had not yet seen the room intended for the Study Room, we also visited the Archbishop's Archives, an important depository of documents relating to this area and going back for centuries. In the capable hands of two archivists, Don Slavko Kovačić and Dr Ivan Balta, the archives are safe. However, they need some help in the way of conservation material, which, luckily, with thanks to our supporters, we are able to offer.

In Zagreb, I met the team from the Conservation Department of the Academy of Fine Arts, headed by Zvezdana Jembrih, who are involved in the making of a replica of the polychrome Gothic sculpture of "Madonna and Child" from the pilgrimage church of St James in Očura, Zagorje, the hills behind Zagreb. Luka Krešimir Stipić, who is carving the sculpture as his post-graduate project, showed us his work. It is going well, and this will also be a fitting memorial to our friend, Dr Anthea Brook, who was devoted to Croatia and always ready to help with the work of the Trust.

We continue supporting the August Šenoa Museum which suffered extensive damage in the recent earthquake. Our project with the Conservation Department of the Academy of Arts in Zagreb to restore the mural by Branko Šenoa was well under way, with plans developed for this new academic year. However, following the earthquake, the mural suffered further damage and was carefully taken down and collected in boxes. The latest, very encouraging news, in spite of all, Neva Poloski and her students have started working on the mural again and we, the Trust, are covering all expenses of the conservation materials needed.

We continue to support scholars in their research and to subscribe them to academic journals. The Linen Project is also continuing, and their beautiful towels are still available at Postcard Teas and Livingstone Studio, for which I thank them profusely. They are also available directly from me. We were to support two scholars to attend the Attingham Trust Course in June, "The Historic Houses of Ireland", but this has been postponed until next year, due to corona virus.

I have just had an SOS message from Jelena Bogdanović, director of Dubrovnik Libraries, asking for help with the conservation of many important books that they hold and need help with. The amounts of money required are large and if anyone would like to make a donation specifically for this purpose, they would be very grateful.

I would be delighted to give more information on any of the subjects mentioned in this report.



Earthquake damage to the Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb

Conservation efforts with help from the ITCM, Zagreb



Work progressing on the wooden replica of Mother and Child, St. James's, Ocurje



The cloister of the Franciscan Friary at Poljud, Split



Earthquake damage To the Archaeological Museum, Zagreb

The two towers of Zagreb Cathedral



One of the parish books from the Archbishop's Archives, Split