



“ALESSANDRO VOLTA” HIGH SCHOOL

You can find this point of interest in Como 6 – Stage 1.

INFORMATION

Location: the headquarters of the Liceo Classico e Scientifico “A. Volta” are in via Cesare Cantù 57 in Como

Paving: via Battisti is made of porphyry tiles with side bands paved in stone; the steps leading to the portico are made of stone, while the pavement under the portico is made of concrete, with the exception of the band at the bases of the columns, made of stone. The space between the access door and the second internal door to the Institute is paved in stone, with a central concrete frame. The atrium is made of stone tiles

Architectural barriers: the entrance is separated from street level by a low step (5 centimetres) that allows access to the landing under the portico in front of the façade. Continuing north along Via Cantù, the rise of the step progressively increases; at the entrance to the church of S. Cecilia and to the next door, this step is divided into two lower ones to facilitate access. There is a very low stone threshold at the entrance door. To reach the first floor, where the collection of scientific instruments is located, there is a wide staircase of low stone steps; an elevator is also available (with a key that can be requested)

Access: it is accessed from the main entrance in via Cesare Cantù 57, to the left (looking at the façade) of the door to S. Cecilia.

Services: Car park in via Auguadri (800 parking spaces); urban and suburban bus stops available in the area outside the walled city; ATMs in via Giulini, via Milano-corner Piazza Vittoria; public toilets in the underpass of Viale Spallino; pharmacy in via Cesare Cantù. Municipal Library of Como in Piazzetta Venosto Lucati

Leisure and Catering: bars, cafes and shops of various kinds in the area; small public garden between Viale Spallino and Via Milano

Other information: pedestrian area with limited traffic. For information on visiting the physics collection, please contact the Institute's secretariat, tel. 031.261498 (Monday to Friday 10.30-12.30; Saturday 10.00-12.00).

DESCRIPTION

(by Paola Corradi)

In Napoleonic times, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Gymnasium of Como (where Alessandro Volta had been professor of Experimental Physics from 1775 to 1778) was transferred from its original location, next to the church of the Gesù, to the former convent of the Augustinian nuns of S. Cecilia, suppressed in 1798. In the same building, following the law on public education of September 1802, with the school year 1803-1804 a new “sub-university” school had also been established, called in 1810 “Liceo dipartimentale del Lario”. The renovation of the rooms of the old convent to adapt them to new needs had already been entrusted to the architect Simone Cantoni in 1804. Cantoni himself designed the Benzi Room, built to house the libraries from the College of Doctors, the Jesuit College and other collections of the ecclesiastical foundations suppressed by

the Austrians and French. This rich book heritage will come to constitute the first nucleus of the Municipal Library of Como. In 1816 the elegant neoclassical façade was completed, embellished with a portico with eight *cipollino* marble columns with Corinthian bases and capitals from the former baptistery of S. Giovanni in Atrio, in turn probably recovered from an older Roman building. The work of adaptation continued in the following years with Biagio Magistretti, a teacher in the same school. In 1838, following a government circular from the Austrian Viceroy Raineri, the Technological Cabinet of experimental physics and natural sciences was established, which also included the endowment of the Royal Gymnasium and the rich collections left to the school by Canon Giulio Cesare Gattoni a few decades earlier. In the years 1845-1846 Alessandro Volta's sons, Zanino and Luigi, donated to the Lyceum a certain number of instruments invented and used by their father; these "relics" were repeatedly requested by the Municipality of Como for its Museum, where they were finally delivered in 1897; however, most of them were destroyed during the fire that devastated the great Volta Exhibition of 1899. The school also hosted a Botanical Garden, created by Giuseppe Comolli, a teacher at the Lyceum from 1809 to 1817. In 1851, following the new Austrian regulations, the merger of the Gymnasium and the Lyceum into the new Gymnasium was arranged; they were again separated eight years later, following political upheavals, but in 1877 the two courses were definitively reunited. In 1865 the Institute was named after Alessandro Volta, to commemorate the scientist's presence at the Royal Gymnasium. From the 2015-2016 school year, the Liceo Classico was joined by the Liceo Scientifico. Already in 1832, in the Aula magna (*Grand'Aula*) of the school, a marble bust of the great physicist had been inaugurated, the work of Gaetano Monti, donated by Francesco Mocchetti, teacher of the Liceo and former pupil and admirer of Volta; in 1834 the bust was moved to the atrium, where it can still be seen today. The "A. Volta" High School preserves a valuable collection of scientific instruments from the times of Volta, that was already part of the first Technological Cabinet of experimental physics and natural sciences. In the years 1998-2003 the collection was carefully restored thanks to the contribution of the Provincial Administration of Como and the Cariplo Foundation and was given a worthy layout thanks to the work of teachers Elettra Coen and Loredana Mattalia with the architect Darko Pandakovic. The oldest instruments date back to the last quarter of the eighteenth century, while the largest group is dated to the first half of the nineteenth century. The objects in the showcases concern the most diverse fields of physics: from mechanics to astronomy, from optics to acoustics, up to calorimetry, fluid dynamics, electricity, magnetism. Among the devices preserved in the "Games" section, it is interesting to remember the so-called "Moretto". Already indicated in the inventories of 1807 as *"a statue indicating a Turk with a flammable air lamp"*, it is mentioned in some writings by Volta himself: *«A friend of mine here in Como [probably Giulio Cesare Gattoni]... he has also built a statue, and placed it on the shelf of a ladder, the copperhead of which is a bomb, and which carries a pistol in his hand, etc. »* and *«It is not possible to tell you how many very curious experiments I have already made, and how many more can be done with this gun by means of the electric spark. Imagine what was the stupor of many spectators, in whose presence I set fire to the pistol with the tip of my finger (after having been electrified on the stool). ... But what made them startle above all was the excitement of the disengagement of the gun at a distance from the machine that was being played. »*

The Lyceum also houses an interesting museum of Natural History (1847), already part of the first Technological Cabinet, enriched over the years with purchases and donations from citizens. There are over ten thousand artifacts including numerous specimens of birds and other stuffed animals (notably the two-headed calf), a remarkable collection of shells, an entomological collection, a very rich nineteenth-century herbarium containing specimens of plants from Como, Lecco and Valtellina, collected and classified by the priest Pietro Ronchetti, as well as a collection of fossil fish from Monte Bolca, some fossils from the ichthyotic schists of Perledo and about two thousand samples of minerals and rocks.