A NEW HOME FOR THE POPE'S ARMY

The Pontifical Swiss Guard is the oldest (and smallest) army in the world. Its sole mission is to protect the Pope, and it has been doing that vital task since 1506 in a continuous line from Pope Julius II through to Pope Leo XIV.

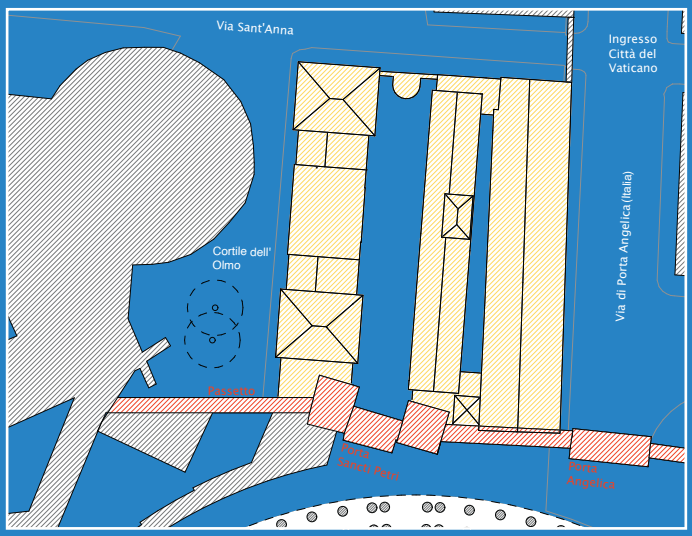
Every member of the corps is required to be male, Swiss and Catholic.

The current barracks buildings (the 'Caserma') of the Guard were built in the 19th century but are no longer fit for purpose. After 150 years, the poor building quality and inadequate insulation are causing both discomfort for the guards and also disproportionately high maintenance costs. The walls are damp, covered in mould, and the plaster is crumbling in many places.

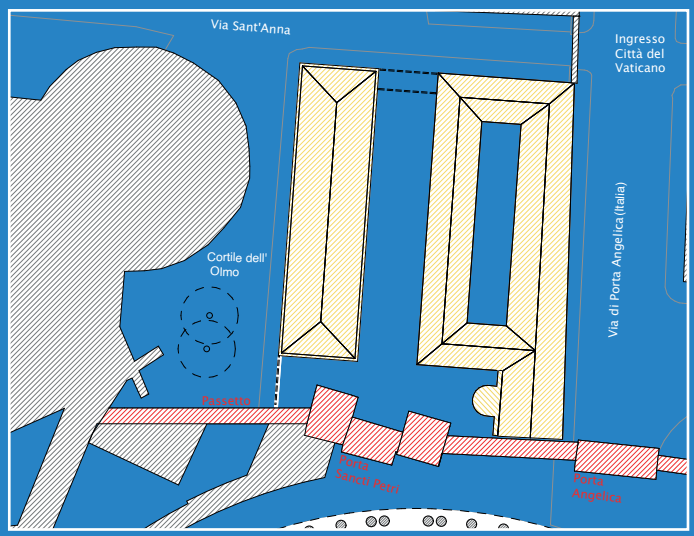
In addition, the type of accommodation is no longer fit for purpose either. At a time when recruitment is already challenging, today's recruits do not find the layout of triple rooms, shared toilets and showers as an unacceptable way of living, especially given that the minimum term of service is just 26 months. With 135 guards in service, the barracks are at full capacity. Since Pope Francis relaxed the rules around guards who have served at least 5 years being allowed to marry, married guards (not to mention their children) have grown by 100% in just 12 years. Today there are 28 married guards and a total of 26 children. Some of them have to live outside Vatican City and are therefore unavailable in an emergency. This also has a negative impact on cohesion and esprit de corps. None of that was foreseen when the current barracks were built 150 years ago!

In 2016, a foundation for the renovation of the Barracks was founded in Switzerland and a feasibility study soon followed, recommending a complete reconstruction of the Guards' barracks on the same footprint. As the Vatican is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the plans to replace the existing building on the same footprint were invariably complex. In 2023, UNESCO approved the plans by Swiss architects Durisch + Nolli, recognizing the Swiss Guard as one of the living institutions that contribute to the Vatican's 'exceptional universal value' as a cultural heritage site.

The foundation began a fundraising campaign in Switzerland which was successful in coming close to the original 50MM CHF target.



Situation today.



Situation Tomorrow.

However, a combination of factors have led to a significant increase in costs. The original plans had to be revised in order to preserve the façade facing the Italian State on Via di Porta Angelica *(Fig. 1)*. The ancient passageway between the Vatican and Castel Sant'Angelo, known as the 'Passetto di Borgo' *(Fig. 2)* has to be separated from the existing barracks and reinforced in the process; the memorial fountain *(Fig. 3 + Fig. 3.a)* at the heart of the Barracks has to be relocated in order to open up access within the courtyard to reveal the ancient 2000 mile pilgrimage route from Canterbury to Rome known as the Via Francigena, which in centuries past actually ended in the Vatican, in the centre of the existing barracks. *(Fig. 4)*

Fig. 1
Via di Porta Angelica is a busy access route to St. Peter's Square. On the right is Porta Sant'Anna, an important gateway to Vatican City.

Add to this inflation costs of raw materials, a sharp rise in construction costs in Italy since the pandemic, as well as measures which need to be implemented in the new building for earthquake safety, groundwater regulations, fire protection and humidity control, all of which meant that the original budget was inadequate.

Fig. 2
Porta Sancti Petri with the Passetto di Borgo.

Fig. 3
New location of the memorial fountain.

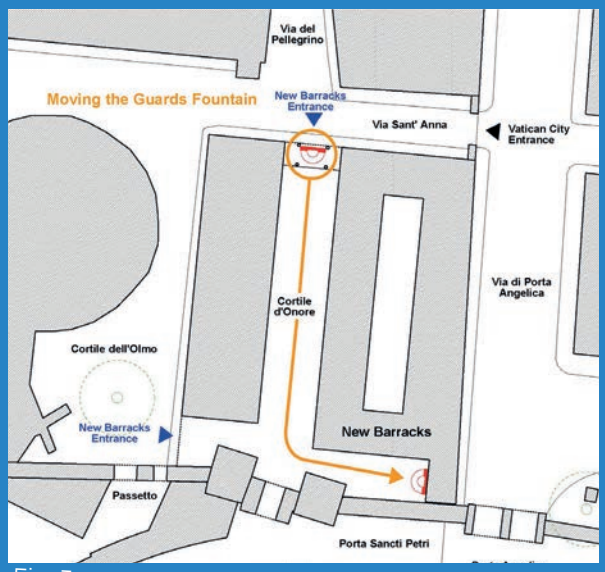


Fig. 3.a
Relocation of the memorial fountain.

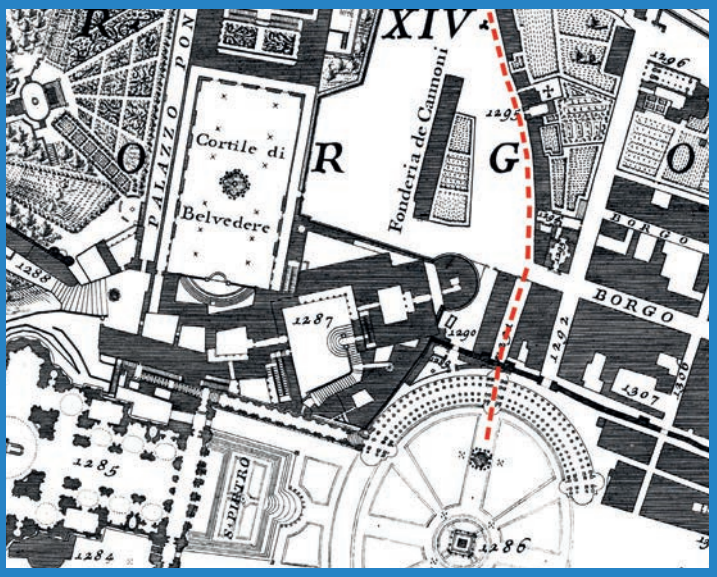


Fig. 4
Reopening of the Via Francigena.

All of these factors have resulted in an additional funding requirement of CHF 25MM (or approximately USD$30MM).

With the election of Pope Leo XIV in May and the forthcoming 500th anniversary of the Sack of Rome in 2027 (when 147 Swiss Guards died defending Pope Clement VII against the forces of Charles V) there is an urgent impetus to begin the first phase of the project: the relocation of the Swiss Guards to temporary accommodation so that construction can begin in 2027 on this major anniversary in the history of the Swiss Guards.

The new Barracks, when completed, with ensuite rooms, attractive communal areas, suitable quarters for married guards and their families, a library, gym and modern infrastructure to support training, will ensure that the Pontifical Swiss Guard can continue to be housed in a manner that is appropriate, dignified and in keeping with the historical surroundings and indeed with their own distinguished history.

Common areas.

Guard's room

Apartment for families

Double room and single room.

Studio and 3.5-bedroom apartment.

The Swiss Guard's new family apartments offer guards and their children a safe and secure home. Modern, functional rooms create a place where families can grow, settle in, and shape their lives together.

Foundation for the Renovation of the Barracks
Office: Käferholzstrasse 56, 4058 Basel, Switzerland
info@kasernenstiftung-schweizergarde.ch *www.kasernenstiftung-schweizergarde.ch*