

LE SCUOLE CENTRALI ANTINCENDI

NATIONAL TRAINING CENTER
OF ITALIAN FIRE FIGHTERS
AND MONUMENT OF
RATIONALIST ARCHITECTURE

by Direzione Centrale per la Formazione
of Corpo Nazionale dei Vigili del Fuoco





Project manager Dr. Ing. Mauro Caciolai

Project supervisor Dr. Arch. Giorgio Orfino

Research and texts by Alessandro Fiorillo

Translated by Dr. Piero Orefice, Dr. Barbara Zotti, Emanuele Gianni

The photographs reproduced in this work are proprietary exclusive to

the National Fire Brigade and they are part of the archive of

"Servizio Documentazione Centrale"

Graphic design Fabrizio Di Claudio

Printed by the typography Servizio Documentazione Centrale



Ufficio Pianificazione, Controllo e Sviluppo - D.C.F.

Finished printing in March 2023

Index

The Inauguration of the schools	4
Architecture of the complex	7
The sports field, the swimming pool, the statues	19
The historical museum of the National Corps	24
The National Corps medals collection	28

“Very worthy buildings of the very human city arise, where the firefighters will learn the art capable of further strengthening the passion and dedication spent daily for the good of the country and the life of citizens; they will mainly learn audacity, courage and maximum availability towards others”

“Sorgono edifici degnissimi dell’umanissima città, dell’umanissima città, dove i vigili del fuoco impareranno l’arte atta a rafforzare maggiormente la passione e la dedizione spesi quotidianamente per il bene della patria e la vita dei cittadini; impareranno principalmente l’audacia, il coraggio e la massima disponibilità verso il prossimo”

on the external architrave of the portico

The Inauguration of the schools

La The construction of the “Central Schools of the Fire Brigade” complex, conceived in 1939, designed by architects **Carlo Di Maria, Claudio Longo Gerace and Dagoberto Ortensi**, and built between 1940 and 1941 as part of the reorganization of the Italian fire services, was the real milestone that sealed the accomplished national unification of the Corps, in that through the initiation of common training it was possible to aggregate and train those people who until then had belonged to different territorial realities. The Schools were inaugurated on August 4, 1941, by Mussolini, together with Undersecretary of the Ministry of the Interior **Guido Buffarini Guidi** and General Director of Fire Operations Prefect **Alberto Giombini**, while the Study and Experience Centre came into operation shortly after, on September 12, 1941. The application school for officer cadets was already equipped with all those laboratories and cabinets for the study and experimentation of the various engineering subjects that would shortly go on to constitute the real Study and Experience Centre, and the officer and non-commissioned officer cadet school was able to have, in addition to well-equipped classrooms full of teaching aids, a drill yard equipped

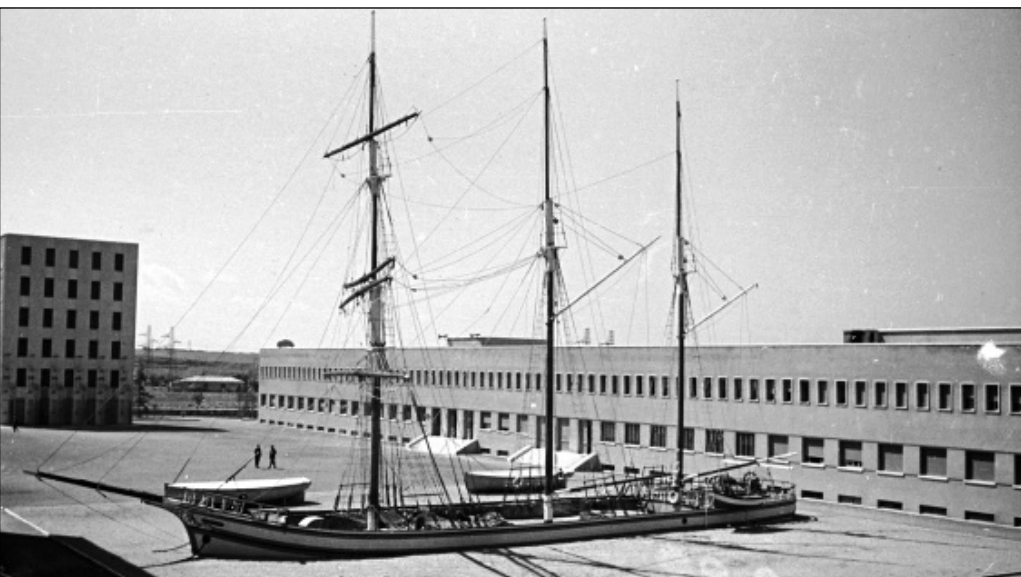
QR-code: Publication
on the 80th
Anniversary of the
Central Fire
Fighting Schools
www.vigilfuoco.it







with a maneuvering castle and a “brigantino” for sea maneuvers, completed later with an experimental field for fire maneuvers and a training center for rescue dogs.



Architecture of the complex

The graphic designs, metric calculations and illustrative report of the entire project, officially drawn up by the Ministry of the Interior's project office, had been submitted to the Ministry of Public Education's General Directorate for Antiquities and Fine Arts in 1940, for the necessary authorisations due to the complex's proximity to any ancient remains of the Appian Way. The study of the project was particularly laborious and meticulous, so that the various parts of the school complex would be harmoniously coordinated to precisely fulfil their intended functions.





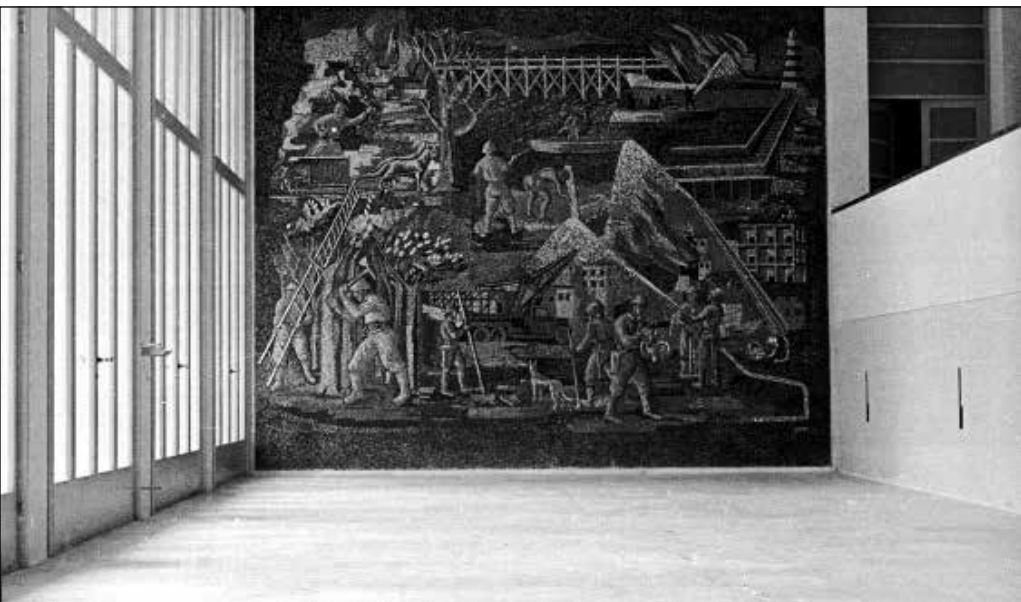
The architectural and landscape constraints protecting the archaeological area of the Appia Antica, already in force at the time, did not prevent the construction of a large, functional and monumental-looking structure, as we can still admire it today.

The Central Schools of the Fire Brigade were conceived as a real large military barracks, organised around two large open spaces with different functions and in turn identified by large isolated buildings. Added to this was a sports centre with a large football



pitch and various athletics facilities, an outdoor swimming pool, an indoor gymnasium and other playing fields.

The architecture of the buildings is inspired by principles of great simplicity, so as not to disturb the harmony of the landscape and to blend in with it as much as possible. The architectural volumes are predominantly low, with the exception of the manoeuvring castle (now called 'K1'), which rises up to 23.25 metres for a total of six storeys in height (including the ground floor), made of reinforced concrete, masonry and wood, and with internal cavities for drying pipes and training personnel in vertically confined environments. The materials used for the cladding were plaster for all the façades and Roman travertine for the portico and the two rows of pillars on the main facade of the building. The entire building stood on the west side of the "Capannelle Hippodrome" and was accessible from the Via Appia Nuova through a wide road on whose axis the volumetric composition of the various buildings was set. In line with this axis, the main building of the



Schools was built, preceded on the right and left by the teachers club building, the officers lodgings and the garage building, which bordered the courtyard of honour with a portico.

The reception atrium of the “School of Official Students” building, today the office building of the Central Directorate for Training and the Central Directorate for Prevention and Technical Safety, was enclosed by a travertine portico facing the entire length of the building, and a long glass wall with fifteen openings to the outside, each of which is set between pillars that are preceded laterally by those forming the two side porticos. Inside, the two side walls are embellished with two large mosaics. The one to the left of the entrance door (north-west wall), created by the painter **Alberto Ziveri** (*Minerva in arms and the specialisations of the firefighters*), depicts the



Minerva, symbolising the world of research applied to the field of fire-fighting techniques and technologies, surrounded by symbols of the specialisations and fields of research of the firefighters. The mosaic to the right of the entrance door, was created by the painter **Lorenzo Micheli Gigotti**, and depicts the activities of the firefighters in various overlapping scenes.

The Shrine of the Fallen Firefighters was built on a semi-elliptical plan with a wall frescoed by the painter **Antonio Achilli**.

The latter, the largest work of painting created in the School building complex, occupies an area of 80 sqm on a curved wall and has the conceptual purpose of representing the help brought by the rescuers to



humanity, exposed to the fury of the elements and battered by disasters.

Framed in a vigorous description of episodes that express the tragic anxieties with which primitive man, left to himself, suffered the violence of nature, is the building of organised relief, “which from fundamental human solidarity rises by sublimation of virtue and generous impulse of heart towards the extreme forms of daring and voluntary risk and culminates in the light of sacrifice”. The list with the names of the fallen in service is published online on the institutional website, in the section dedicated to historical memory: <https://anniversario-sca.vigilfuoco.it/it/deceduti-in-servizio>.

Adjacent to the shrine, a historical museum was



set up where relics of the fire-fighting vehicles and equipment used by the first organisations and the Civic Fire Brigade Corps were collected.

A large hall, inside which there was also a frescoed wall, was built for conferences and film screenings. The painting in this hall, executed in tempera by the painter **Schiavina**, which no longer exists, depicted the triumph of Italy, and had on one side the figures of the *vigiles* of imperial Rome, and on the other the

QR-code: go to the "fallen in service" chapter from the historical memory section www.vigilfuoco.it





modern firefighters; furthermore, on the background, could see a Roman town on one side and on the other the complex of the Central Firefighters Schools and the 'Tullio Baroni' Firefighters House in Borgo a Buggiano. In two places well hidden in the painting were two small windows, one for the film projector and the other for the operator, which were used to project films on the right wall of the lecture hall. Inside the building there was also a large library, a lecture room, a chemistry classroom, a drawing room and one for the radio operators. There were five teaching and scientific research laboratories, the construction of which was almost



completed in 1943: industrial chemistry, industrial mechanics, hydraulics, construction science and materials testing, and electrical engineering. In the same building we could find, the parlor for officer trainees, the command offices and the living quarters for officer trainees with separate dormitories, with adjoining reading and music rooms, the refectory with the kitchen, as well as a well-equipped facility for various services were built. The same building also housed the cinephotographic sector, equipped with photography and cinematography equipment, intended to provide documentation and study material for the Schools. There was also a large room equipped

for testing gas masks and Supplied Air Respirators (SCBA). A large courtyard inside the building and a vast forecourt outside were intended for outdoor experiments.

A number of historical relics, such as hand-operated fire pumps, a steam-powered fire pump and a Fiat car, are now preserved and exhibited in the atrium.

Among the most important decorations of the entire





complex are those on the sides of the courtyard of honour, where on the heads of the porticoed buildings with square-section travertine columns were placed the two large bas-reliefs, which still exist today, created by **Fortunato Longo** on the right (*Firemans in action*), and by **Cosmo Soggi** on the left (*Firefighters in the myth and*



technique of imperial climates from Augusto and Mussolini).
One depicts various scenes from the life of firefighters in their functions, the other represents them in myth and explains the evolution of their technique since the time of the legionaries of the Roman Empire. In the centre of these figures is a Saint Barbara, dividing the ancient from the modern representations.



The sports field, the swimming pool, the statues

Other architectural elements of great value were those found in the area dedicated to sports exercises, which included the football pitch, the gymnasium, the swimming pool and the statues that adorned it. The Nautical Stadium, of particular beauty, was enclosed by a wall with five openings on the main façade towards the football pitch, which was flanked by two





25-metre diameter hemicycles with eleven arches each, five of which framed large marble statues depicting athletes in various attitudes, symbolising the sports disciplines practised by the Fire brigades.

The statues were created by sculptors of national and international renown, and in the 1960s, following the demolition and reconstruction of the swimming pool, they were moved to the perimeter of the grandstands of the sports field, where they

still stand today. Each statue, 260 cm high, rests on a cylindrical base covered in travertine with a diameter of 95 cm and a thickness of 15 cm. The sculpted athletes represent: Footballer, Dodger, Boxer, Swimmer, Rower, Oval ball player, Weightlifter, Discobolus, Skier. The Sculptors are respectively: **Campitelli, Castelli, Colla, Cozzo, Monteleone, Olivo, Rosatelli, Spampinato, Ticò and Vignolini.**

Attached to the nautical stadium, there was a building, also measuring 50 x 15.50 m like the pool, inside which there were rooms for boxing, fencing, wrestling, and weightlifting, as well as a large gymnasium, containing frescoes by **Roberto Baldassarri**, also equipped with an infirmary and a “bagno finnico”; the floor was made of *suberit* and the dressing room of polished natural oak with natural walnut strips. The entire pool-gym block was clad in Tivoli travertine with Viterbo peperino cornices. The pool, which was 50 m long, 15.50 m wide and 8 m deep, was decorated with mosaics and had two diving boards of different heights (3 and 5 m), a platform and a water purification system, the bacteriological sterilisation of which was carried out by means of two dosing devices of chlorine and ammonia compounds.



The historical museum of the National Corps

The historical museum of the National Corps, restored and reopened on 5 August 2021, has been housed in the premises next to the Shrine since the inauguration of the Central Fire Fighting Schools on 4 August 1941.

Modified and rearranged several times over time, in the 1990s it was gradually dismantled and its materials were partly reused and displayed in the other Corps museums distributed throughout the country, in particular those in Rome, Mantua and Bari.

The current tour of the museum, which also includes the atrium on the ground floor of the building, begins with an illustration of the historical phase relating to the transition from the communal period (1800-1935) to the National Corps. On display in the atrium are two suction and pressure hand pumps made by the company Pietro Berzia of Turin, dating back to the second half of the 19th century, as well as a horse-drawn steam pump made by the London company Merryweather, dating back to 1880, and a Fiat 502 F vehicle from 1926, originally used by the Municipality of Pinerolo (TO) and then entrusted to the local detachment in 1936, which adapted it to use as a fire truck.



The first room on the basement floor displays a number of original objects and memorabilia in use by the municipal firefighters since the second half of the 19th century. Among the most significant and rare objects are the “schizzettoni”, two ante litteram brass fire extinguishers from the second half of the 19th century, which, like large syringes, were used to draw water and throw it on fires from distance. There is a hand pump from the Ferdinand Schenk house in Berne, suction and pressure, which was carried on the shoulders of the municipal firefighters to the scene of the fire. A steam pump, also from the London-based Merryweather company, which was originally placed on a wheeled cart pulled by hand. There are on display also numerous daggers, sabres and bayonets, also from the second half of the 19th century, which were used



to accompany officers uniforms, as well as various paintings of the uniforms by the Russian painter, naturalised Italian, Alessandro Degai. The exhibition in the first room is completed by three splendid period uniforms, two from the communal period, one of which belonged to the Sub-Commander of Rome, Engineer Vincenzo Sebastiani, and the other from the 1940s, the Great Officers Uniform (an almost unique piece in Italy).

In the second room, the National Corps' banners made and handed out to the provincial corps during the First National Camp held in Rome's Piazza di Siena in July 1939, as well as original objects, materials and memorabilia from the wartime period (1939-1945) are displayed. Prominent among these is the "bomba pirofuga", a device whose task was to extinguish fires by removing the oxygen needed for combustion. Its explosion caused a violent displacement of air and the projection in every direction of bicarbonate, which

formed a dense cloud that then descended to cover everything. It was used during the Second World War to stop fires in civilian homes following bombings. In the gallery that runs through the museum and joins the first and third rooms, the 1943 National Association of Fire Fighters on Leave labelling is on display.

The third and fourth rooms display uniforms, helmets, fire extinguishers, radios and instruments in general from the post-war period onwards, characterised by the remarkable and rapid progress of technology and scientific research. There are on display also the “esplosimetri”, closed- and open-loop breathing apparatus, filter masks, rocket launchers and line launchers.

In the modern multimedia room that closes the exhibition, films and digital resources are shown illustrating the rapid evolution of the fire services from its origins to the present day. To enjoy the contents of the exhibition, visitors can not only read the texts in the exhibition, but also use the QR codes that refer to resources and multimedia material published online in the historical memory section of the institutional website: <https://anniversario-sca.vigilfuoco.it/it>

QR-code: Go to the
“historical memory” section
www.vigilfuoco.it



The National Corps medals collection

QR-code: go to the chapter
"honours" in the historical
memory section
www.vigilfuoco.it

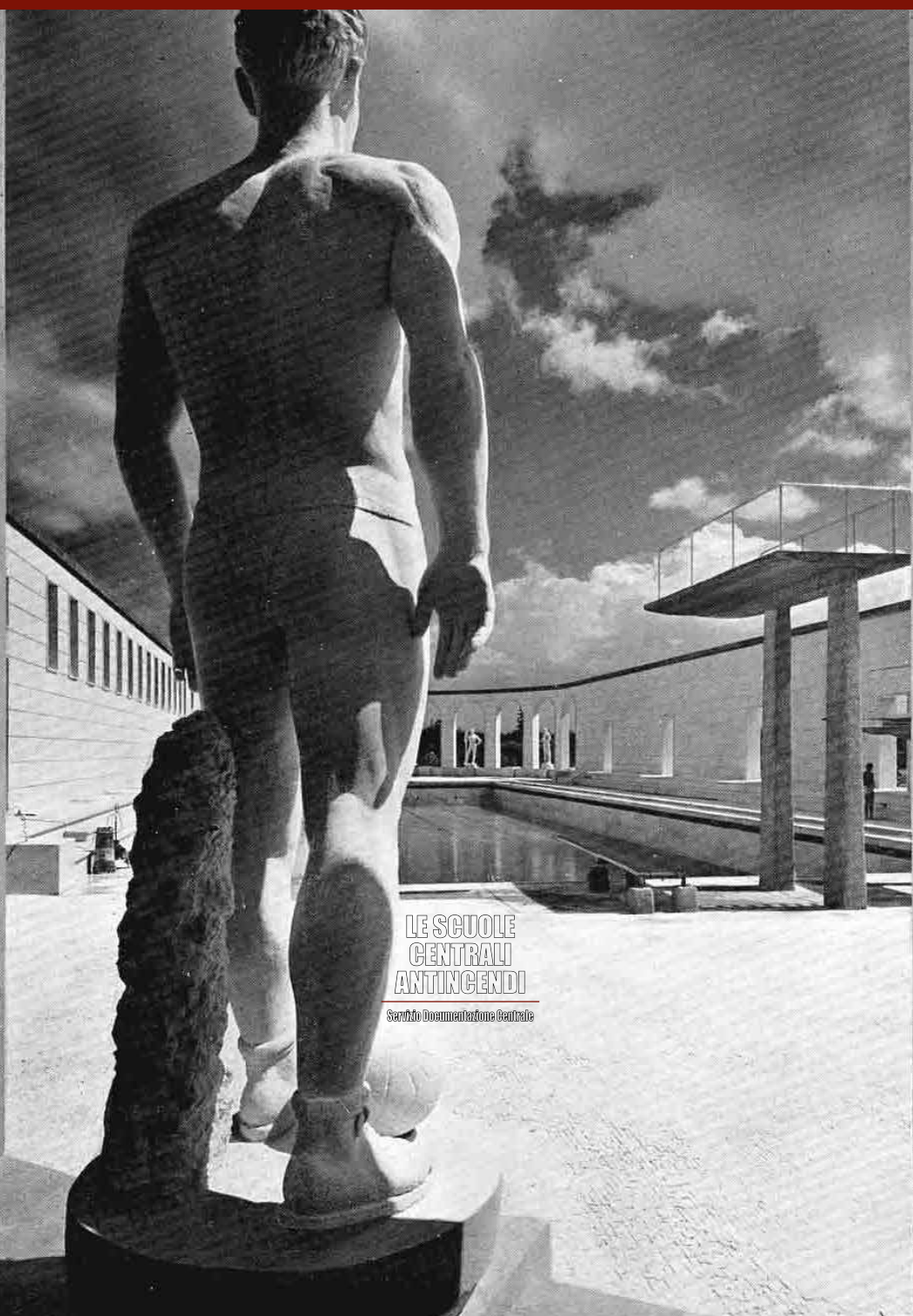


Since August 2021, the Central Training Directorate has also housed, in specially constructed display cases on the first floor of the main building, the civil valour medals awarded to the National Corps flag over the decades. The complete list of decorations on display, with the reasons for their award, can be read on the dedicated page on the institutional website: <https://anniversario-sca.vigilfuoco.it/it/onorificenze>.





Servizio Documentazione Centrale



**LE SCUOLE
CENTRALI
ANTINCENDI**

Servizio Documentazione Centrale