

## The Story behind Hotel Torre Guelfa

The surname of the “Acciaioli,” originally from Brescia, means “steel merchants.”

The industry’s founder, Guigliarello, made it a successful business, bringing fame and wealth to the family; however, he eventually found himself threatened by jealous rivals, the Federico Barbarossa clan, and was forced to flee. He found refuge in Florence in 1160 and bought property there, in Borgo Santi Apostoli and in the Tuscan countryside. In Florence the Acciaioli set up a profitable commerce in rare and precious fabrics and became shrewd financiers. Later one of the most prominent family members, Niccolò (1310-1365), became a skilled politician and obtained important posts from the Kingdom of Naples, eventually becoming “Gran Siniscalco” or Prime Minister and Constable. Descendants of Niccolò, the Counts of Melfi, made important conquests in the Far East and Greece. By the time he returned to Florence Niccolò had become one of the richest and most influential men in the city. It was at this point that he decided to build an important palace, of which the actual Hotel Torre Guelfa is a part. The impressive structure was to be erected on Borgo Santi Apostoli, just opposite other property already in his possession.

The building, constructed out of rustic hewn stone, has a severe fortress-like appearance, similar to the Bargello museum. It has three floors, including a mezzanine, with the facade subdivided by slightly jutting ledges. To the right of the entrance is the famous 13th century tower, erected in 1280 by the Buondelmonti family, former owners of the site, whose history is briefly inscribed on a marble plaque on the facade. In those times it was a tradition among noble Florentine families to build high towers as part of their residences.

In the 14th century, the tower became part of the Acciaioli palace and has miraculously survived many conflicts from medieval times through the second World War, making it one of the last and highest historical towers still standing. On the facade we can still see the famous wrought-iron torch-holders, the banner-holders, the large iron rings used to tie the horses’ reins and the hooks, R-shaped, on which rested wooden poles for hanging laundry or fancy drapes with which to decorate the palace on festive occasions. When Niccolò Acciaioli died he gave his entire residence to the Certosa, the famous monastery which he founded, located in the town of Galluzzo just south of Florence. Bearing testimony to this important event is a stone plaque over the palace entrance inscribed with the Certosa and Acciaioli coats of arms.

Thus, from the 14th century to 1806 the residence belonged to the Certosine friars, who, however, lost it during the Napoleonic invasions. It underwent various changes in ownership until 1864, when the Pettini family restored it, and again in 1920, when the Pettini Burresi family undertook a second renovation.

In the entrance vestibule one can see a 19th century marble plaque with a shield on which is inscribed the Acciaioli family coat of arms. The plaque briefly sums up the building’s history until 1864. Another note of interest is a precious fountain on display in the Bargello museum. It is inscribed with the Acciaioli and Federighi family coats of arms and was probably removed from one of the palace halls. It was almost certainly sculpted on occasion of the wedding of Lorenzo di Donato Acciaioli (1472-1544) to Angela Federighi.

A legend has it that in some of the palace rooms the happy spirits of the betrothed couple still frolic ever-seeking the places which recalled their joyous and carefree youth...