



DISCOVERING VIA VENETO

It hardly seems possible. Where we now see the hotels and ministries in Via Veneto, a little more than a hundred years ago, there grew old trees, woodlands, stretches of open ground and “casini di delizie” (lodges of delights). Indeed, the area stretching from Porta Pinciana to Piazza Barberini, and from Piazza Fiume to the Aurelian Walls, was the largest stretch of parkland in Rome - Villa Ludovisi. Just after the Unification of Italy, the Princes Boncompagni Ludovisi realised it made good business sense to sell their property to the State of Italy. The area was quickly divided into lots and turned into a lively dynamic residential area also frequented by tourists. Via Veneto was opened up to traffic already in 1886. Of the old Ludovisi property, only Villa Margherita remained.

Villa Margherita, the palazzo built by the architect, Gaetano Koch, for Rodolfo Boncompagni Ludovisi, is now the seat of Embassy of the United States. The family has retained the Casino Boncompagni Ludovisi (Via Lombardia 46), housing the Aurora by Guercino and the Four Elements by Caravaggio.

Today our memories of the treasure held by the Ludovisi family have faded away.

But something of the Dolce Vita remains. The Dolce Vita of the early 1950s ended as quickly as it began. At that time, Rome presented enormous advantages for American movie makers.

During the Fascist era, the studios at Cinecittà were manned by very highly skilled professionals willing to work for low pay. Between their various studio sessions, actors, screen divas and producers would flock to Via Veneto in the evening. The street became a glamorous venue, attracting international stars and providing the backdrop for the events that would fill the gossip columns of those years. The film does not transmit this image. The street is empty. Only Arab and Chinese tourists come here. The only nightspots open here are strip clubs. And there goes Gambardella.

