

A visit to San Siro Stadium – a living monument.

Cara Button's Henry Morris Trust 'Project with a Purpose'.

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, it was announced that both AC Milan and Inter Milan (the two rival teams who call the infamous, now 100 year-old, San Siro stadium home) had each produced plans to develop their own separate stadiums in the city. These plans would leave San Siro abandoned. Perhaps turned into a museum, perhaps to be demolished, its fate remains to be seen, but in any case it will be emptied before the end of the decade.

When the news broke I was a relatively fresh football fan, having begun going to Ipswich Town matches in 2021 with my friends as a way to meet up with one of the group who had moved. To this day, I still struggle with my place in football culture. Not only am I a woman, meaning I will always be taken less seriously by most male fans, but I came to the game late since neither of my parents are fans themselves. I don't play, I didn't have MatchAttax as a kid, and I couldn't tell you what position Declan Rice plays for Arsenal, even though I know his name. Any FIFA-playing teenage boy would run rings around the extent of my 'ball knowledge', the endless quiz in which the passing grade is a group of mildly sexist men deeming you a true fan. Having read all this, you too are probably wondering why I call myself a football fan, and why I was so desperate to witness a match between two foreign teams in a foreign stadium.

The answer is relatively simple. To me, football is not just a game or a transfer market or entertainment; it's a collective, cultural experience which has social and political implications. Although my 'ball knowledge' may not be up to par, I have a deep understanding of football's relationship to society, and how the game has evolved over time – for example, how the identity of football is moving away from the working-classes who built the game and towards the corporate sponsors and celebrities. Any match-going fan will tell you that football can be a bonding, uniting force within a community: being surrounded by the people from your town, dressed in your colours. Broadly speaking, anyone who is wearing your badge is your friend. Even beyond the matches, the football is often the first thing I discuss with my regulars at work and the aesthetics of football ultras, 'terrace culture', has made its way into popular fashion – 2022 was the summer of the Brazil football shirt, and 2024 the summer of the Adidas Gazelle.

However, nowhere does football have as much influence, as much cultural force, as Italy. While England may be the home of football, the cultural markers of patriotism for one's town and club, collective dress, and yes, hooliganism, spawned from the Italian ultras. This is highlighted by the Italian brands at the forefront of the subculture: Stone Island, C.P. Company, and Kappa to name a few. Italian fans are infamous around the world for making football more than just a game; their ultras

groups not only make the best atmospheres and made football fandom a status symbol through their high-end clothing, but also have strong connections with the powerful mafias and an inclination towards the cultural masses rather than the wealthy benefactors. In Italy, football is a thoroughly social experience, focused on the enjoyment and passion of the fans rather than the stardom of the players.

This entirely different approach to the beautiful game, alongside the demise of the biggest, most important, and uniquely shared-by-rivals stadium in Italian football (and football in general really) meant that there was truly no other place or time to go on this trip. As you will go on to find out, many of my preconceptions about Milan and its football teams were challenged, and my appreciation for its people and culture significantly deepened. I am extremely grateful to the Henry Morris Trust for permitting me this opportunity which I have immensely benefitted from, both by growing my independence, and expanding my understanding of the cultural roots and importance of football, the game I fell accidentally in love with.

*NOTE: I was accompanied on this trip by my boyfriend, Isaac. This report will be written from my first-person perspective, but he is likely to be mentioned, or the plural pronoun 'we', 'us', etc. used, where appropriate. He did not benefit from the Trust funding, and paid his own way to come with me.

DAY ONE ---- LAKE COMO. 29 AUG.

After a month of intense planning and the formation of a clear itinerary, I found myself awake at 1:30am in the back of my boyfriend's dad's car, on my way to Gatwick Airport. Armed with only a backpack for the next 4 days, and my prayers that it would fit in the carry-on sizer, I was tired but buoyed with excitement at my dream of several years finally coming to fruition.

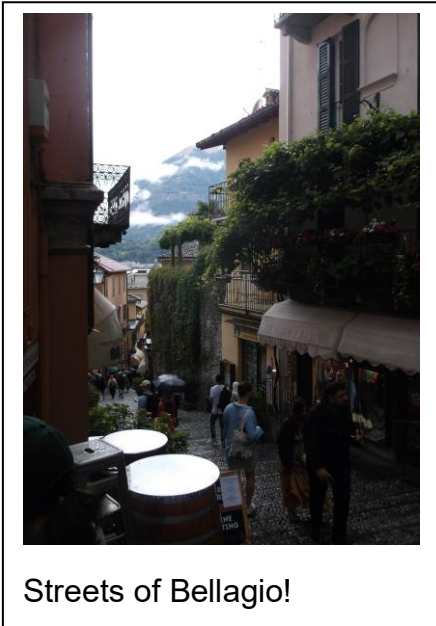
After a Wagamama's breakfast, a smooth flight and a rather expensive mozzarella and parma ham toastie in the arrivals lounge, one hour on a FlixBus had taken me from Milan-Malpensa Airport to Como, from where the weekend's adventure was to begin. The decision to start the project in Como was, admittedly, Isaac's idea as one of his dream destinations and the location of the villa used for the wedding scene in Star Wars. However, I believe it added a depth to the trip which I would've otherwise missed out on. Lake Como provided the opportunity to see the quieter rural culture in Lombardy before moving on to the busy city – our hostel was situated in a converted farmhouse, run by the family who lived and worked on the farm itself which was right outside our living spaces. They were



The Bellagio promenade (in the rain)

extremely hospitable, and take extreme pride in their slow, rural lifestyle. They make jams, honey and aromatic blends from their gardens, own a grove of olive trees for oil and breed sheep. What's more, there is a spring of natural water running through the property. I was struck by the simplicity of their peaceful lives, in which time is only measured by the harvest clock and the blooms of spring.

The first afternoon and evening in Italy was spent in Bellagio, a



Streets of Bellagio!

beautiful town at the very top of the peninsula that splits Lake Como in half, where we were staying. Despite the heavy rain, we explored the hills and shops, seeing plenty of Como silk for sale and (luckily for us) some €5 umbrellas. I took the opportunity to visit the stone church we found at the top of the town – I adore Catholic countries for their beautiful places of worship. Although I am not religious myself, I am fascinated by religion and I certainly feel a sense of calm and security in religious buildings.

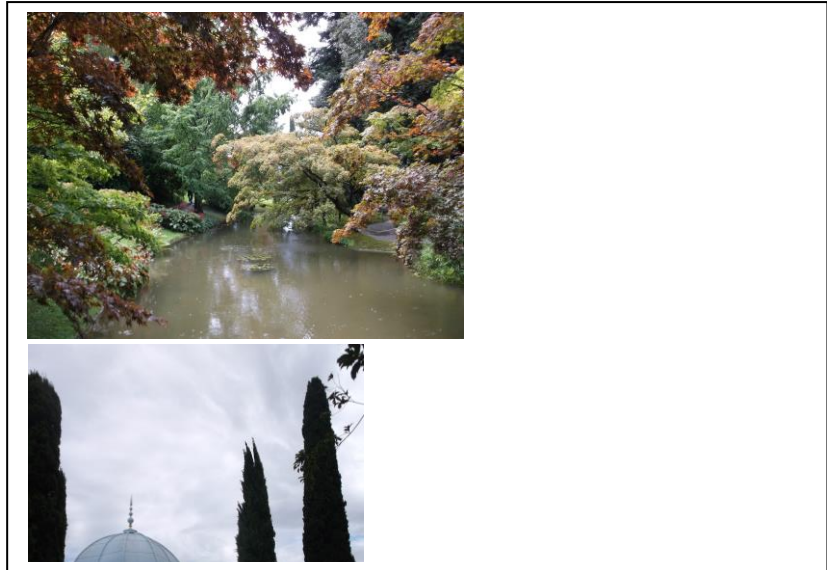
The theme of this whole project, really, is exploring community, and religion certainly belongs in that

category. In a church, there is quiet – a collective respect and reverence which is rarely found these days – and the weight of hundreds of years' worth of people: worshippers, mourners, grooms and brides. The Catholic icons are monuments of care for each other, and I do wonder if this is perhaps why football lends itself so well to the Italian culture. For the ultras of Italian football, the stadium becomes their church, their team their God, and their fellow fans their community. Perhaps it serves as a freer way to express themselves, since the Catholic church is somewhat known for its generally stricter stance on social propriety.



Breakfast at the hostel, featuring their beautiful dog

In any case, the early flight and extensive wandering certainly caught up to us, and by 3pm we had set off for our hostel, a short 20 minute walk along the lake front through the garden of the Villa Melzi, a stately home for which entry came free with our hostel reservation. The views were breathtaking and the Lake was so blue despite the stormy weather, I was so deeply appreciative to have taken on this adventure.



The evening ended with a pizza and an authentic carbonara (my favourite meal) from a Bistrot recommended by the hostel, both of which were delicious. We fell asleep to the cracks and booms of the thunderstorm outside the hostel, thoroughly exhausted but extremely fulfilled and excited for all that was to come.

DAY TWO ---- REACHING MILAN. 30 AUG.

Day two began with a delicious homemade breakfast in the hostel, served by the family, and accompanied by their beautiful dogs. We set off early, this time able to enjoy the Villa gardens in the sunshine, in order to catch the 11:45 slow ferry back to Como city. Although tickets were double the price of the bus we had initially taken along the peninsula to reach Bellagio, the extra £10 was deemed a worthy sacrifice for the opportunity to sail across the azure waters, gawking at the various stunning villas and towns we passed along the way, including of course, the Star Wars house.



Ladies and Gents, The Star Wars

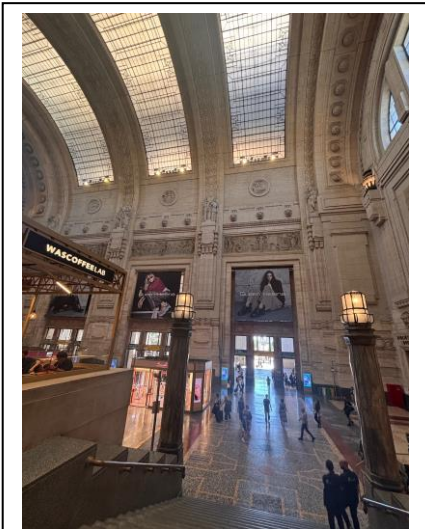
Although Como is undoubtedly a tourist hotspot, I feel that between the hostel and the church



Another town in Como, Nesso

especially, I really got an understanding of the natural rhythms that underpin life in rural Italy, particularly the importance of their communities. The businesses all strive to support each other, like the Villa gardens allowing hostel guests free entry, the Bistrot recommended by the hostel, and the food collecting we witnessed at a smaller church close to the hostel. Care for each other and the land seems to be at the heart of rural society.

Upon arrival in Como city, we made our way to the train station, stopping at a supermarket to pick up a makeshift lunch – in absence of a meal deal, we picked up slices of focaccia with tomato puree and some Napoli salami to go on top. Even supermarket food feels simple and fresh. While planning the project itinerary I had discovered that the Como San Giovanni train station was originally the site of a Catholic monastery, responsible for the trials and executions of suspected witches in the 13- and 1400's, one of the earliest witch hunts of the early modern period. I had studied the Como witch hunt for my History A-Level, so while it was not the focus of the project nor was visiting the site intentional, I was still very excited.

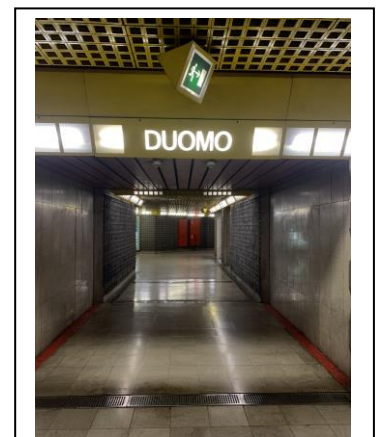


Milano Centrale station

From the station a brief 40 minute train journey took us to Milano Centrale, perhaps the grandest train station I have ever laid my eyes on. The curved ceiling felt miles away, spliced with translucent windows so that light filtered naturally into the space. Beyond the platforms was a marble-floored lobby where, after some unsuccessful attempts on self-service ticket machines, I finally asked the information desk where to find the metro ticket offices. I was instructed to go down 3 flights of stairs, into yet another beautiful lobby, then to the underground shopping centre and from there follow the signs to the corner shop ticket office. After seeing all the grandeur and endless designer labels, I felt certain that Milan was to prove a very different experience then

Como.

7 stops on the very 70's-esque, shapes-and-colours M3 metro line took us almost to the door of our hostel, where we got some much needed rest before preparing to explore the Navigli canal district in the evening.



The M3 Metro Line!

Navigli, another tourist hotspot, is situated along the old trading canals in Milan and is mostly covered in bars and street vendors in the evening. The atmosphere was vibrant and buzzy, and we saw the sun setting over the water – such a lovely setting. The ensuing bar crawl was an enjoyable, casual affair that was a lovely break from the fast-paced day of travel. Of course, it's not particularly relevant to the project so I will not go into detail, except for the drinks menu we were given at one bar. Behind the menu was around 50 blank pages, all written on by various previous customers. Some had been playing hangman or noughts and crosses, others drew the scenery or flowers, and some wrote about their lives and made wishes. I was struck once again by the simplicity of human connection, and how through time and place we are all one people, regardless of language or hometown or interests.



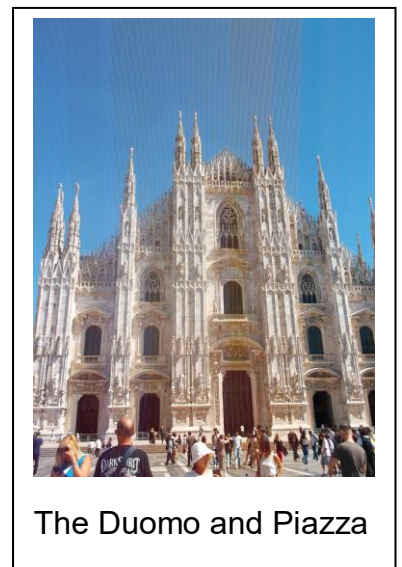
The collectively-decorated drinks menu

The idea of everyone leaving a mark everywhere they go, and of 'sonder' – that every person has a whole life and network around them that you will never know about if they're, say, sat across from you at a bar, has been on my mind for a while now. It's something I always look out for, and I found so much of it while pursuing this project. I knew that Milan was a fashion capital, and as such in my mind it was a trendy, modern city with a fast-paced

atmosphere, always looking to the next season. However, I would now argue that Milan is a city of contrasts. The constantly-changing fashion shops are situated under a centuries-old train station. The fast-paced bars decorate a still, serene canal built for a time before cars. The metro is a time capsule of design trends in the 70's, when its plans for construction were made, and the customers at this particular bar had come from far and wide and had taken the time to write in the book simply because they wanted their presence to be known and left behind. And of course, the most significant contrast: a stadium filled with fans in red one week and fans in blue the next, but both sides wearing black stripes, and both sides there for the same reason. Everything in Milan seems to become different constantly, while also never really changing.

DAY THREE ---- THE CITY AND THE GAME. 31 AUG.

I had accommodated a lazy morning for day three, since the game later on would stretch far into the night and it was something of a late one the night before. So, it was around midday when we left the hostel and set off for the Duomo di Milano, a helpful 2 stops away on my favourite metro line. The exit to the metro comes out right in the piazza in front of the Duomo, meaning it seemed to rise out of the ground as I went up the steps. The piazza was bustling, with what seemed to be



The Duomo and Piazza

some sort of missionary/converting tent opposite the cathedral that ushered in tourists and Italians alike. Pigeons everywhere were landing on tourists and pecking at the crumbs on the floor, covering the brilliant white area and completing the Italian scene.

After a brief, overpriced food truck breakfast we made our way to the cathedral entrance and up something like 250 steps to its roof. From the top, we got a close-up view of the gothic spires and mini sculptures that adorn every part of the Duomo's exterior, including the image of Joan of Arc. Not only

could we admire the breathtaking architecture though, the roof of the Duomo offered panoramic views over the whole city, from which we spotted the San Siro stadium and the Duomo Market. The glorious sunshine only added to the impressive size of the city which stretched as far as I could see.



San Siro, from the roof of the Duomo

After the roof we were able to explore the inside of the cathedral too, and were astonished by the attention to detail and brightness of the stained glass windows, which we learned were contributed by

artists of many European nationalities, not just Italians, which is why the art style of the Duomo is referred to as 'international gothic'. The pillars lining the main body of the Duomo feel almost cold, and serene. In my research for the trip I saw

some people describe them as like ancient trees, and I think this is appropriate – in the darkness they create a sense of history and secrecy, and as

with every time I enter a church I am awestruck at the effort that went into bringing the Duomo into existence. The hundreds of years of planning, designing, building, and maintenance simply to create a space dedicated to a person's beliefs and devotion. Beliefs and devotion which are shared around the world. Although, I was somewhat surprised by the simplicity of the interior compared to the practically glowing, intricate white marble that makes up the exterior. It seemed to be almost metaphorical of the different versions of ourselves, who we present and who we are. The exterior



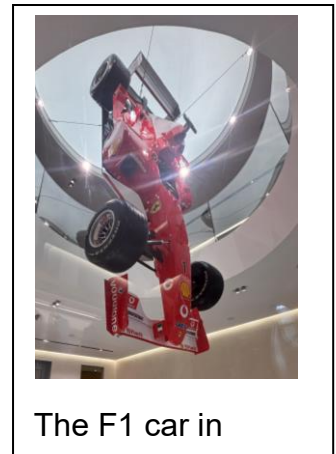
The gothic spires on the roof



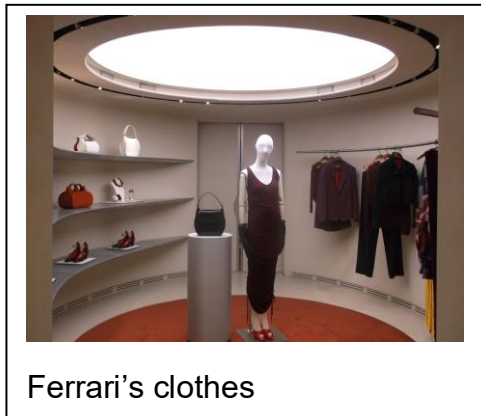
The pillars in the Duomo

emphasises grandeur and impressiveness, whereas the refined simplistic stone interior is altogether humbler and more focused on worship.

After the visit to the cathedral, we had some food before exploring the famous shopping district, starting with the Duomo Market – a magnificent building with a glass dome in the ceiling of the cross-section, decorated with rich mosaics. It is also Italy's oldest shopping centre. We did not spend long in here though, since we didn't fancy our chances trying to get into Prada or Tiffany, so we left to window shop in the actual district, it seemed to be the case that the further one got from the Duomo, the more



The F1 car in



Ferrari's clothes

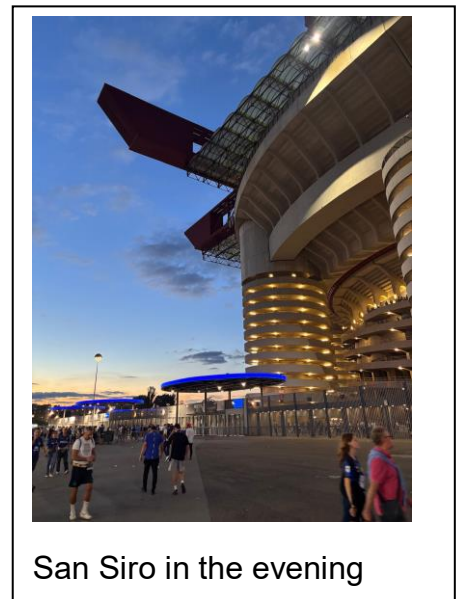
affordable the shops. Very close by were brands like Ferrari (who's shop had an F1 car hanging from the ceiling, and many beautiful 70's-esque clothes), then smaller prominent labels like Kappa, then after 15 minutes' walk, we reached an exceptionally large Zara. The contrasts of Milan appeared once more to me, just 15 minute's walk had completely changed the shopping experience from refined, quiet, supervised luxury displays to an absolutely manic 3-floored mayhem of fast fashion.

After stopping for some postcards at a street vender, we found ourselves back at the hostel once more to rest before the match in the evening.

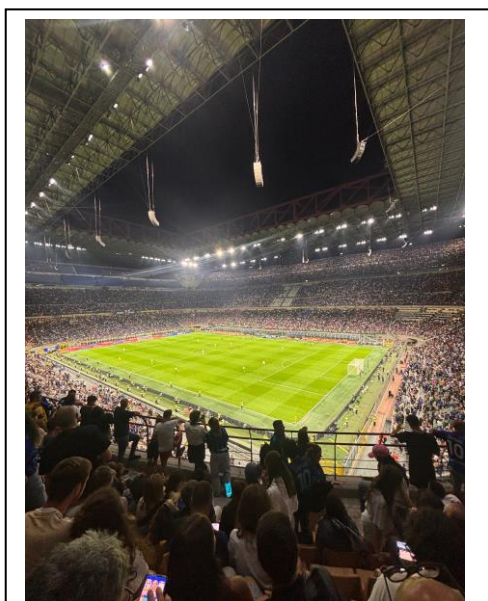
When the time came to leave for food before the game I was already buzzing, unable to contain my excitement at being able to watch San Siro come to life after so long; and also a little bit pleased that everything had gone to plan so far. This was quickly extinguished though when after half an hour of hungry waiting for our pizzas to arrive, I spoke to staff and was told that they wouldn't arrive in time for us to eat them and still make kick-off. So, naturally, food was unfortunately sacrificed as we left for the metro.

One of my favourite parts of football matches is the journey to the grounds. As a fan who travels in, it fills me with such joy to spot other Ipswich Town fans on the train, which gradually fills with more and more blue shirts the closer we get to Ipswich. The same thing happened on the way to San Siro, with more and more Inter Milan shirts taking over the metro. It was interesting to spot the tourists as well as regular fans too. There was what appeared to be a northern English father and son stood near us, both wearing Inter shirts, but sticking out for their excited discussion and slight uncertainty that all tourists share – multiple stops near San Siro meant we were all watching the Italian fans to see where to get off. Despite my blinding hunger, this shared trait still made me smile, another point of connection between strangers.

Arriving at San Siro is a feeling I will never forget. Emerging from the metro station, I found myself in a flat concrete area, with the stadium standing tall and wide in front of me, surrounded by the hustle and bustle of fans and food trucks and merch stands and scarf sellers. Twilight was just beginning to set in, and the half-pink, half-blue sky complimented the yellow lights and red metal beams of the iconic stadium. As with the Duomo earlier, I was astonished by the size of the stadium, and awestruck by the beautiful spiral structures which surround it. Being up close I realised too that the ramp design is also part of the body of the stadium, making it seem slightly twisted. I cannot stress enough how impressively beautiful it is, for 70's-esque brutalist concrete architecture its extremely inviting, while also feeling firmly alien. It's a asterclass of stadium building.



San Siro in the evening



San Siro from the inside

After (finally) eating from a food truck, we entered the stadium with just 10 minutes before kick off, not how I had planned, but exciting nonetheless. Walking out of the concourse and into the stand is always a breathtaking sensation, seeing the stadium open up around you, but I had to have a moment to take it all in when I emerged into San Siro. There's just so many people, everywhere! And the stands are so huge, the roof feels miles away. Although the interior of the stadium is in a 'bowl' shape (common for large stadiums, but also a departure from the classic 4 stands of older stadiums which I personally prefer) it doesn't feel like one since there are four cylindrical towers which poke out the top of the stands' corners. The pitch is luminous under the lights, and my only complaint of the whole evening is that the seats were

very poorly labelled, so we made ourselves look a pair of right fools stumbling around trying to find our seats for so long.

As the teams came out of the tunnel, the stadium dimmed and lights chased each other around the pitch. The fans put on their phone torches to illuminate the stands and the whole stadium felt like more of a theatre, an experience. Throughout the game, the chants and noise of the Curva Nord especially was deafening. Sat on the nearest corner of the next stand over, we were positioned perfectly to soak up the atmosphere, and I even learned a few chants although I had no clue what I was saying. After Nathan Dumfries scored the first (and only) goal for Inter the crowd erupted, and they used the same chant pattern for his name as my team do for one of our players, which charmed me. There was 3 goals in the game, 4 yellow cards, 1 penalty, 2 VAR checks, and plenty of fouls so everything you could want from a game really. I especially enjoyed the penalty that



The Curva Nord, a wall of blue and black

Udinese took against Inter Milan, since although they scored it, it was in the goal nearest to the Inter fans, who whistled so loudly in an effort to distract the player that I feared for my eardrums, it was an impressive display. It was such a shame that the match ended in a 1-2 loss for Inter Milan, since the fans had so much energy and I am sure the celebrations would've been immense. However, I was still thrilled to have experienced being under the lights at the famous San Siro, so I had little to complain about.

Even leaving the stadium was thrilling, as I got to use the ramps I have raved so much about, and watch other fans waking down the spirals, which make a kind of



The fans leaving via the spirals

optical illusion of the concrete structure twisting, since you can't see the fans' feet. I was ecstatic. We decided to walk further away from the stadium to a metro stop that served a different line we could use to get back to the hostel in hopes that we wouldn't have to queue, and this seriously paid off while also allowing us to see more of the fans. We walked past a bar with a group of about 100 ultras outside it, chanting and clapping to a drum beat. Their noise,

despite being a relatively small group, was inspiring. They come across as extremely organised and calculated in their support, something that English fans generally lack.

The night had been a total dream for me, and I could not be happier with it. It has been on my mind constantly since leaving, and I want so badly to return. The energy

of the stadium the whole night was positively infectious, and the level of support was something I had never witnessed before. The football was not just a game that night, but a display of strength and community. Despite the outcome, it felt as though the fans and the players were one – they played off each other. The fans supported the penalty by distracting the taker, and they yelled at the referee when the players couldn't. In return, the players performed well (Udinese's goals were very lucky in my opinion) and put on a good show for everyone who turned out to support them. Italian football is a symbiosis, and it unites everyone, it makes everyone important, and in that respect it is wholly unique.

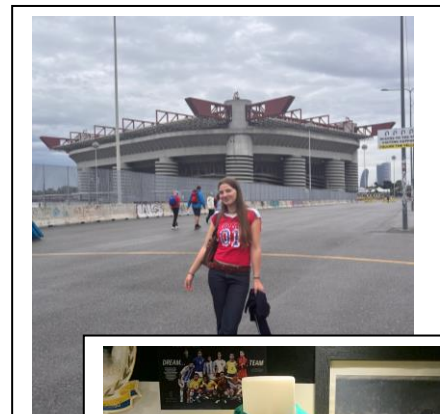
DAY FOUR ---- STADIUM TOUR AND THE RETURN TO ENGLAND. 1 SEP.

Day four began with an early wake up to pack, organise, and check out before returning to the stadium for a tour at midday. We were surprised to find the hostel buzzing and filled with people eating breakfast, and supposed that this must be what life is like when you don't need at least 10 hours of sleep to function (which actually we never got despite the lazy mornings).

The tour of San Siro was extremely enlightening. It began in the museum, which is unusual, and we were able to view a model of the stadium, the trophy

collection and various memorabilia of iconic players and the stadium's history alongside some enchanting plastic life-size players. As discussed in the introduction, my 'ball knowledge' is somewhat lacking, so my favourite part of any football museum is always the memorabilia and old shirts. As

highlighted by my excitement around the Como train station, I am something of a history buff, and I am also interested in fashion, so seeing the design and construction of football shirts change over time is fascinating to me. I marvel at the old cotton polo shirts. To me, a hot and sweaty polo is a nightmare, but I suppose that it's actually a very breathable natural fibre, so it's an organic solution from a time before polyester got popular. I also like seeing the ways tickets and programmes have changed in style and material over time, and especially old photos. It is incredible to me that humans have invented ways to preserve snapshots of our lives



At t



A classic cotton football shirt



The trophy cabinet

– from the stadium’s humble beginnings to Bob Marley’s performance and generational players, San Siro’s rich and varied history only emphasises its status as a historic building.

The tour proceeded through the players’ entrance, past the interview walls and into the changing rooms. We were told that since the stadium is shared between two teams, the ground staff have 3-4 days to change all the branding between games. This was something that had caught my eye during the match the night before – almost all the billboards and signs at the gates and around the stadium are electronic, adding to the atmosphere by creating a more premium, almost American-basketball-esque feel, but also helping the staff by reducing the turnover workload. In addition, we were reminded of the stadium’s true name – the Giuseppe Meazza Stadium – named after a player who played for both teams, a beautiful nod to the community and shared aims of the fans of AC and Inter Milan.

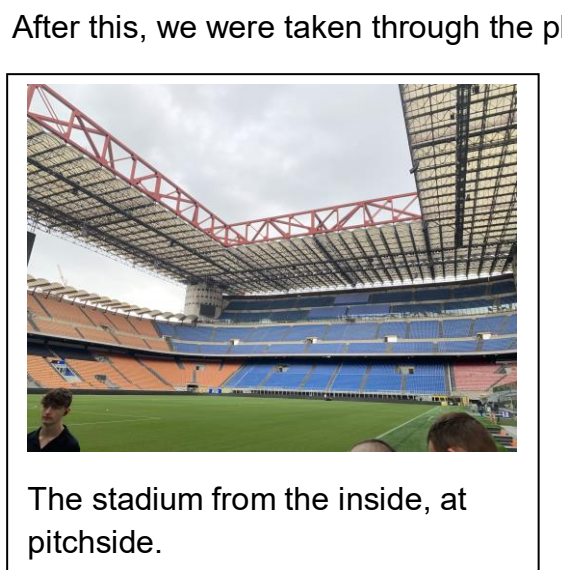
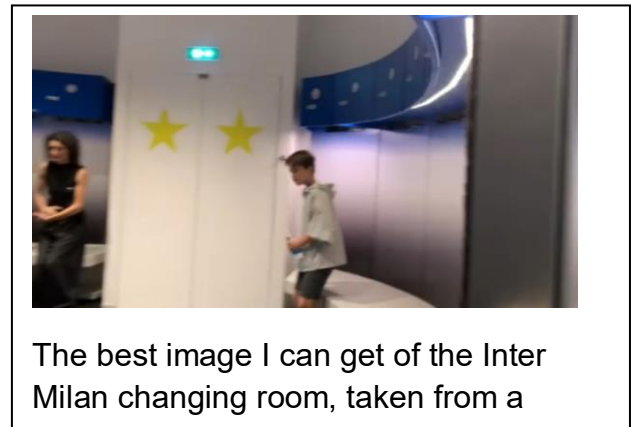


The AC Milan changing room

The difference in changing rooms really struck me, and seemed in my mind to emphasise the difference in club spirit between Milan’s teams. AC Milan, the older, more popular (and more successful) of the two has attracted sponsors and money from a variety of corporations, making them wealthier and reinforcing their cycle of success. The entrance to their dressing room goes through all their achievements since the club was formed, and the room itself has red LED strips across the ceiling, moulded comfy seats and a central table with their logo on it,

along with boot boxes and charging stations for phones. It was the epitome of expensive, with only the phrase ‘We are always and forever Milan’ across the top of the dressing room to nod to any sort of attachment to the city or each other, and even that can only be partially seen from most seats since only the captain can see the whole team. In its very design, it is clear that AC are the show pony of Milan, and that they were founded by an Englishman, since even their changing rooms come across pompous and excessive.

On the other hand, the entrance to Inter Milan's changing room has shadows of important players on the walls, with the final two shadows nearest the changing room left blank to encourage current players to succeed. The room itself is minimalistic and bare, and could be found in any non-league clubhouse to be honest. The players sit on a bench with a small locker above them, all in a semicircle so as to see each other. There is very minimal branding beyond the blue colour, and the ceiling is devoid of LEDs. The contrast is so stark that one has to wonder if it is intentional. It certainly makes Inter Milan come across as far more humble, an image only emphasised by the reason behind their creation. At the time, AC Milan were becoming increasingly nationalist in their management of the club, only allowing Italian players and creating a hostile environment for the global fans they were beginning to attract. As such, a group of breakaway AC members founded FC Internazionale Milano, aiming to improve their success by recruiting international players and welcoming fans from all walks of life. This more inclusive approach makes Inter seem much closer as a team and to their fans, reflected in the design of their simple dressing room.



flames for AC Milan and a blue and black snake for Inter Milan and then taken out onto the pitch. The stadium once more unfolded around me, although it somehow felt smaller from the ground (mind you at 85,000 capacity, 'smaller' still means absolutely massive) and we were told about the Curva Nord and Curva Sud where the ultras sit, and the different boxes and kinds of seats available. Safe to say we were unfortunately unable to sit in the member's boxes at the game the night before, but we were comfy in our €39 plastic chairs. A very random fact I

found quite interesting was that the pitch is a hybrid of fake and real grass, which I suppose makes upkeep easier and maintains a certain level of friction even when it gets more damaged towards the end of the season, but it was something I didn't expect... maybe its quite common though and I just didn't know.

Regardless, with the tour now over the project had come to a close. After some food we went to the gift shop so I could buy a scarf to add to my collection (any new stadiums or teams that I see I must get one), although I was also tempted by the Inter Milan toothpaste and body wash too. I want to smell like a football team thank you!! My scarf reads 'Di Padre in Figlio' (meaning 'From Father to Son') with an image of San Siro in the middle and a parent and child in front of it. It was the perfect one in my opinion, representing both the community-focused nature of the club, and the infamous stadium the trip had really been about.

We wandered through the streets of Milan a little longer, reaching a huge Arc de Triomphe-style archway in a park, which we discovered had been the gates to Milan during Napoleon's time, and a castle at the other end of the park. We ate gelato on a bench before searching for an affordable clothes shop for an hour and a half to no

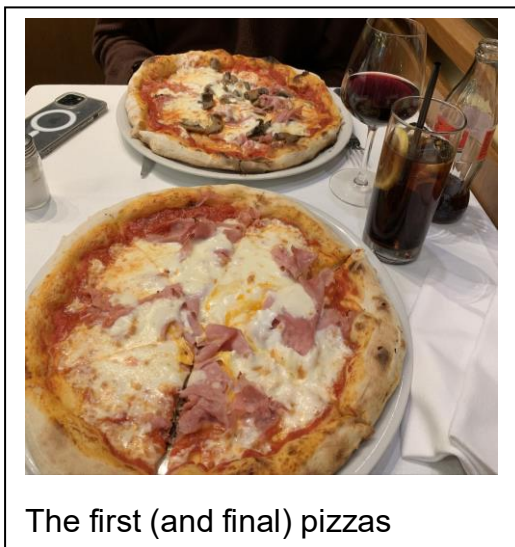
avail (the only disappointment I have with Milan really, but to be expected) and somehow managed to walk ourselves back to the Duomo where we briefly hopped on the metro back to the hostel. From there we picked up our bags, finally got a refund for the pizza disaster on the night of the football match, and immediately set off for the train station, where we enjoyed a luxurious but affordable meal just outside it as the heavens opened, and then had to run for our train despite having an hour

and a half to spare initially since we lost track of time – honestly only I could plan so meticulously and then forget how to read a clock.

An hour on the Malpensa Express took us direct to the airport with a good 2 and a half hours before our flight, only for it to be delayed for 3 more, causing us to land in the UK just before half past 3, 10 minutes too early to apply for delay compensation. Good old Ryanair am I right? Even so though, after such a fulfilling trip I couldn't be too angry since I had enjoyed myself thoroughly.



Milan's Arc de Triomphe



The first (and final) pizzas

CONCLUSION

Through this trip, facilitated by the Henry Morris Trust, I have been able to immerse myself in different aspects of Italian culture from rural to city living, Christianity to

football, enriching my understanding of how Italians have shaped football culture – and through this, my life. Not only this but I have been able to enjoy a variety of beautiful architecture from different centuries, such as the medieval churches and Victorian villas in Como and the gothic cathedral and post-modern, brutalist stadium in Milan.

Through exploring the significance of these buildings within their communities, and experiencing the different ways they affect people (the reverence and comfort of the churches vs. the adrenaline-inducing rush of the stadium) I feel I now thoroughly appreciate the importance and impact of community. This project initially merely sought to see San Siro come to life, but I have come away with a far deeper appreciation for the people who make these spaces special. As highlighted to me by the simple impact of shared messages between strangers at the bar in Navigli, everyone has different motivations, different lives and experiences which inform their relationships to others. I now realise that it is for this very reason that the breakaway team Inter Milan was formed (to resist nationalism and encourage inclusivity) but also why they were allowed to play at San Siro after it was built: the teams both have the same passion and patriotism for their city, but explore this differently. In football, for teams to recognise similarities and parts of themselves within their rival team is extremely rare – particularly since the ‘ultra’ culture developed in Italy has only served to deepen love for one’s team above all others, and therefore opposition among fans. For the original ultras to show such connection, despite their antagonism, is a different outlook on the beautiful game which continues to support the purpose of team support – connection.

Not only did this project allow me to see a cultural giant in full force before it is abandoned as a monument to times gone before, but I got to share in Henry Morris’ appreciation for living arts, like the architecture and paintings that featured so heavily in this project. I found also that the spirit of the communities housed in such architecture was reflected in their creation. For example, the Milan Duomo was built by Christians all across Europe, and the scale of it surely meant that people of other faiths and beliefs contributed to it’s development, supporting it’s aim of being an inclusive church. The San Siro stadium has a different origin, being commissioned by AC Milan president Piero Pirelli in the 1920’s instead of organised through public funding, however it has a similar intention as it was the first purpose-built football stadium in Italy, giving the fans a true home that could be purely theirs to celebrate. I feel that Henry Morris would also enjoy the way that people’s kindness and intention shows up in their work, transforming architecture from being simple buildings to intentional works of passion, to support one’s community.

Ultimately, this project has been successful beyond anything I might’ve imagined for it. I am extremely grateful to the Henry Morris Trust for supporting me on the endeavour, and it has hugely supported my personal confidence and belief in my capabilities, as well as giving me the opportunity of a lifetime and allowing me to witness a completely new culture, housed within a living monument.

