

## The tented roof

The octagonal part and the steeple top (2) were completed in 1319 under the guidance of Anselmo da Campione, and together constitute a single inner space of no less than 30 metres in height. The structure is built using medieval bricks, and the outside is decorated with stone slabs, many of which were substituted between 1890 and 1896, and of which the metal support plates may be seen high up on the walls. Only the upper part, the outside of which is covered in lead, still features the most ancient stone slabs. Inside, the chamber walls are plastered, and during the renovation process carried out between 2008 and 2009, part of a fresco was uncovered, dating back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and which is visible above the plates commemorating past interventions, and traces of dark grey may also be visible on the upper part. In the past, the chamber must have been entirely decorated. The magnificent helical staircase which with its 119 steps provides access to the two outer balconies, was created in 1609, and follows the lean of the walls, rising up some 28 metres. The woods used for the staircase are oak, poplar and spruce. The staircase rests on delicate iron shelves which showed signs of major weakening, and for this reason were recently coupled with 22 new shelves, created in such a way as to be easily removable without altering the ancient structure. Of the eight lancet windows that characterise the outside, four are bricked up. According to the chronicles, this floor was consolidated after the instability caused by the 1501 earthquake, which called for reinforcement to be placed around the entire outside stone vestment. In order to consolidate the structure and prevent the slipping of the inclined façades, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century a series of radial metal braces were laid out in the pyramidal part of the steeple, and another long-standing set of chains may be found at the centre of the floor vault. Neither system is entirely reliable, and for this reason, in 2010 two new external hoops were added.



## How to visit and Information

### Opening hours Ghirlandina Tower:

From 01/04 to 30/09: Tuesday to Friday 9:30 to 13:00 / 15:00 to 19:00; Saturday, Sunday and holidays: 9:30 to 19:00.

From 01/10 to 31/03: Tuesday to Friday 9:30 to 13:00 / 14:30 to 17:30; Saturday, Sunday and holidays: 9:30 to 17:30.

Closed on Easter Sunday, Christmas Day and January 1. Opened on January 31, feast day of St. Geminiano, Patron of Modena. **The ticket office closes half an hour before closing time.**

### Tickets:

Ghirlandina Tower ticket: 3.00€ per person

Free admission for children up to 5 years, disabled visitors and carers, teachers accompanying classes of all levels, guides and interpreters.

Combo ticket: cost 6.00€, it allows the holder to visit Ghirlandina Tower, Sale Storiche frescoes in the Town Hall, Acetaia Comunale and Museum of the Cathedral, within opening hours as indicated on the ticket.

Free admission for children up to 5 years, disabled visitors and carers, teachers accompanying classes of all levels, guides and interpreters.

### For information:

IAT Tourist Information Office - Piazza Grande, 14 - 41121 Modena

Phone: +39 059/2032660 - Fax: +39 059/2032659

e-mail: info@visitmodena.it - Site: <http://www.visitmodena.it> - #visitmodena - <http://www.unesco.modena.it/it>

Times / costs may vary. Information updated: [www.visitmodena.it](http://www.visitmodena.it)



Servizio di Promozione della Città e Turismo

Updated to August 2015

AR/S Archeosistemi Soc. Coop. - [www.archeosistemi.it](http://www.archeosistemi.it)

# Civic Tower (Ghirlandina)



## The Construction Process

The Ghirlandina Tower, symbol of the city of Modena, stands alongside the northern edge of the Cathedral. Its name (the 'little balustrade') probably derives from the decorative railings crowning the spire (A).

Debate on the chronology of the building work is still going strong, since there are no specific historical records on the early construction phases. Analyses carried out on the occasion of the recent 2011 restoration campaign indicate that there was a common building site shared with that of the Cathedral. The construction of the tower, started at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, ended in 1319.

Throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century, restoration work was carried out on the octagonal section of the Tower, and in 1588 the spire was further raised slightly. Various interventions completed the building: for example in 1609 the wooden staircase was built inside the tented roof (2); at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the buildings leaning on the side of the Tower were demolished; and in 1901 the current entrance on via Lanfranco was opened (8).

The Tower is linked to the Cathedral by two arches added as far back as the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and renovated at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup>.

Ever since the Tower was constructed, it has housed a belfry which, from its inception, has been endowed with a key civic role: the sound of the bells marked key events in the town's history, signalling the opening of the gates in the city walls, and summoning the townspeople in the event of alarm or danger. The chamber known as that of the 'Torresani' (4) was where the tower guards lived. In addition, the Tower's thick walls housed the treasury of the Town Council, containing the city archives (7), as well as various relics and other precious objects belonging to the Cathedral (6). Today the Tower belongs to the City Council, and still houses the bells, (3) which signal the start of Cathedral services.

Almost 90 metres high, the Ghirlandina is made up of a square base with sides 11 metres in length and 50 metres in height, surmounted by an octagonal section and a steep tented roof, crowned by a golden sphere and a cross (1).

Up to the floor level of the belfry (3), the Tower is made of material salvaged from the Roman town, with a brick structure covered in some 22 different types of stone cladding from North Italy, Istria and Turkey. However, above the belfry and in the spire, specially purchased materials were used.

The Ghirlandina Tower leans towards the South-West because of its interaction with the ground subsidence, although the degree of inclination varies at the different levels as a result of the various corrections made in the wake of the subsidence that took place during the construction process.

Height 89.32 meters



## Decorative Elements

The Tower is adorned with a great number of decorative elements, with five cornices resting on arches and sculpted ledges (B). The first three cornices are embellished with corner sculptures depicting fantastical beasts (C), animals (D) and human figures (E). On the second level on the Eastern side, there are three panels of Roman origin, featuring both plant and animal figures (F); while the third level, on the southern side, bears the head of the Medusa. The double and triple lancet windows on the fifth level are adorned with intricate capitals (G), 19 of them being on the outside of the building, while eight are inside the Chamber of the Tower Guards. In the capitals and numerous human or animal protomes along the ledges, as in the corner relief elements on the third cornice, the styles and production methods are the same as those that appear in the capitals of the Porta Regia of the Cathedral, and the supports of the Pontile, dated to between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. In 2011, traces of red decoration were found under the arches on the second cornice, on the eastern side. (H). This appears to be a sequence of lily flowers, dating back to the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, possibly the work of the Campionesi masters themselves. It is thus an important find, suggesting something about monument decoration in the medieval period.

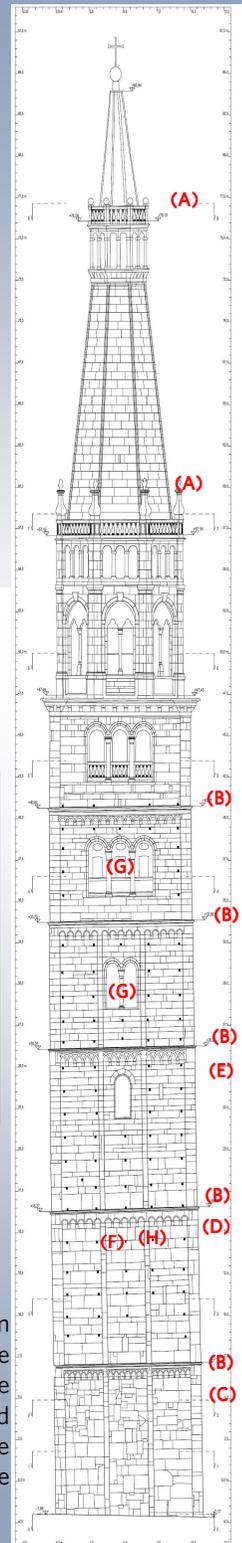


## Chamber of the Stolen Bucket

The *Chamber of the Stolen Bucket* (6) is to be found about midway between the ground floor and the first stringcourse: there is no correspondence between the cornices on the outside and the levels at which the floors are to be found on the inside of the Tower. As early as the start of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, relics and other precious elements belonging to the Cathedral, along with documents concerning the local Community, were stored both here and in what is now an access passageway. The name of the room derives from the wood-and-iron bucket which, as legend has it, the Modenese stole from a public well in via San Felice, in the centre of Bologna, during the *Battle of Zappolino* (1325). This ignoble war trophy, which soon became so highly treasured as to be used as a civic symbol, was made famous by the poem of the same name by Alessandro Tassoni, published in 1622, which states:

***But the bucket was soon to be locked away,  
In the tallest tower it remains to this day.  
Up on high the trophy hangs bound  
By a great chain nailed far off the ground.***

For security purposes, the original is kept to this day in the Town Hall: the bucket hanging now from the centre of the room is a replica. Frescoed from top to bottom, the room looks like a giant treasure chest, opening onto a starry sky through a fine square grate, recalling the lattice motif found at the entrance, perhaps to allow a good view of the bucket. The decoration features Gothic elements, and therefore in all likelihood dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. This is interesting because it is a sign of the importance attributed to this environment, and in particular the use of the fake vair motif, as once used to line the mantle of emperors.



## The Chamber of Scientific Instruments

From this floor (5), which once housed the ends of the bell-ropes, we may observe the internal structure of the building, an open stairwell more than 20 metres high. The flights of stairs intersect with the four corner pillars but seem not to take account of the large windows, overlapping them at various points. In 1898, in order to calculate precisely the inclination of the Tower, a number of measurements were carried out by letting down two plumb lines from the spire, along different vertical lines. On every level, the floor still features the marble dowels that fixed the points of reference for these measurements. Since 2003, monitoring of the inclination has been entrusted to an automatic control system. Part of it is a copper tube that runs the entire height of the chamber and contains an electronic pendulum, one of a broader range of instruments installed to control the movements of the Tower and the Cathedral over time. All these sensors are connected to a computer which records and archives the measurements for interpretation by specialist technicians. The brickwork was completed using bricks plundered from the ancient buildings of the underlying Roman town, *Mutina*, which had been covered by thick layers of alluvial sediment.

## Chamber of the Tower Guards

In the *Chamber of the Tower Guards* (4), lying on the fifth level and completed by 1184, lived the so-called 'Torresani' (Tower Guards). They were at the service of the Town Council, their presence being documented from 1306 through to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They would watch over the city, give the signal for the opening and closing of the gates, and ring the bells to mark the hours, raise the alarm in case of danger and herald public occasions. At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the *Chamber of the Tower Guards* was partially transformed into a lookout, facing toward the ducal castle. Two elegant benches were then added, and the fresco completed; it featured the coat of arms of Modena City Council, topped with the eagle of the d'Este family bearing the ducal crown, which was probably repainted at the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The north-west corner pillar houses the spiral staircase leading to the belfry, which houses eight columns, each topped with a capital. They are probably dateable to the end of the second construction period of the Tower (around 1180), and two of the capitals feature particularly interesting scenes.

In the *Capital of David* (eastern lancet) the themes of music and dance are represented, as they also are in a number of external corner reliefs along the third string course. Among the scenes carved we may make out a bearded man, crown on head, intently playing a harp; this man may be identified as King David, who in the Middle Ages was considered the spiritual father of the arts.

In the *Capital of the Judges* (southern lancet) the theme of good and bad judgments is explored: this was probably a prompt for the judge as he came to pass sentence on a disagreement. The inscription tells us that an unfair judge, corrupted by money, is likely to pass a sentence which does not reflect his real beliefs as to the truth of the matter.

It is impossible to know for sure whether or not these capitals were originally destined for the *Ghirlandina*; however, the religious theme of one, and the civil theme of the other seem to mirror the dual purpose of the Tower: it was indeed at one and the same time both the steeple of the Cathedral and the Civic Tower.