

Novelda Visit 15th November 2013 by Rena Roskoss

A very cold windy early morning (8.30) saw us depart for Novelda, little traffic on the motorway meant that we arrived early at the Casino. We had a short wait for coffee. Coping with early arrivals would appear not to be Spanish strength, although coffee and bikkies were very welcome!

A tour of the casino followed. I didn't need the few Euros that I had earmarked to lose, as we learnt that the Casino was a term also used as a meeting place, generally of business men, latterly women and families as well. When the building was constructed in 1888 it was an imaginative and unique project and incongruous for what was a very rural area and village. The style of the Casino was clearly influenced by business travellers who had seen similar grand designs in Paris and Barcelona. It also reflected the inherent wealth of the area, which was from marble quarrying (uniquely a deep red with white streaks), viniculture and latterly, distribution of spices. Expansion continued for some time with additional grounds, terraces and bandstand. The Casino continues in daily use by members including women who meet to play El Pachis (Pachisi) - who knows maybe a new group for U3A?

A short walk through the town took us to the Ayuntamiento, which was considerably older and was the site of a water exchange. The tiled murals there reflected some of the activities of the town. The walk along narrow streets, unchanged for many centuries, showed some smaller houses with ornate features reflecting the affluent architecture of the developing town.

The most famous modernistic/art nouveau home (now a museum) was not available for us to visit. After seeing details and pictures of this house and contents on the Internet, it was brought home just how much we missed by not having the opportunity to see it. The entrance to this famous building used to be free, but within the last few months. Thanks to Sabadell Bank a charge is now made. This aside, it was necessary to book well in advance as they did not sell tickets on the door. A second house built at the same time by the matriarchal Pichocho family (now housing the Tourist Office and used by the Ayuntamiento) was similar in layout but had lesser features and fewer of Art nouveau trappings that makes Novelda famous. It did give us a tantalising insight to what may have been.

Lunch, in the Spanish style of Tapas, main meal, desert and coffee was very welcomed and fuelled us for the afternoon's visit to the Modernistic Sanctuary dedicated to Mary Magdalene.

The small church in a prominent position some 3 Kilometres outside of Novelda. It was built by Jose Sala Sala a pupil of Gaudi's, and not surprising that, on the outside at least, similarities could be seen, albeit on a smaller scale, with the turrets and the meld of softer architectural features and organic form. The inside however was quite a surprise, delightfully less fussy and serene. A spectacularly unique organ made entirely of marble was being installed; however it was switched on for us to appreciate. The resounding sound enveloped us, made more incredible when one could in the smaller pipes feel the gush of air whilst it played.

The sanctuary also contained newer ecclesiastical buildings, which are not now used.

Next to the Sanctuary is the fortification also known as Mola Castle. Clearly the elevation and the panoramic view made this a prime defensive site. Recent excavations have found Roman ruins on the site. The Castle was originally built by Arabs in the 12th Century and added to by the Christians in the 14th Century. Some agile and brave members of the party climbed the unique triangular Arabic tower, up through dark narrow steps, (here lights from mobile phones proved really useful). It was worth the climb, despite the cold wind as the views were even more extensive and spectacular.

