

Garibaldi, the hero of Italian unification, was born 200 years ago this month. DANIEL PICK and TRISTRAM HUNT explore the reputation of a ruthless military commander whose name has become a byword for peace and unity – and whose myth has inspired politicians of both left and right

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GLORIOUS GARIBALDI

Garibaldi, shown in Etienne's c 1850 painting, has inspired political idealists throughout the world since his role in Italian unification

DURING THE BLOODY SUMMER of 2006, as Beirut burned in the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict, hundreds of Italian troops departed from Brindisi to serve as UN peacekeeping forces. They sailed to Lebanon on the pride of the Italian navy, the aircraft carrier *The Garibaldi*. For Garibaldi aficionados it was a telling moment: the legend of "the General" setting off once more in the grandiose hope of delivering peace and unity by force. It was an appropriate collage of myth and symbol, imagery and reality.

This month marks the bicentenary of the mercurial hero who gave his name to that ship, General Giuseppe Garibaldi, the inimitable military commander, navigator, adventurer, and champion of nationalism, who conquered the south of Italy and joined it to the north in 1860, but who also spent much time endeavouring to further the cause of internationalism and world peace.

He is a man whose myth proved as powerful and contradictory in death as in life. And the battle for his legacy began before his body was even cold. In his will, he gave instructions for his death to be marked in an unorthodox commemoration that would involve no guiding role for dignitaries and bigwigs, and that, appropriately for this veteran critic of the Vatican, would rile the Church in equal measure: a simple cremation on a pyre in the open air – inspired perhaps by accounts of Shelley's funeral on an Italian beach.

In fact, his passing in 1882 was to be orchestrated by the authorities in Rome – a phalanx of politicians and well-wishers decided on burial rather than burning, before setting sail to Garibaldi's home, on the island of Caprera, near the coast of Sardinia, in order to lay the national hero to rest in the more pompous manner they thought fitting.

This disavowal of Garibaldi's wishes has set the scene for the ongoing posthumous squabble. In fact, so many contradictory political impulses and martial symbols, nationalist yearnings and cosmopolitan ideals are embodied in the daring life of Garibaldi that almost every vested interest, from trade unionists to monarchists, fascists to communists, have felt the need to stake their claim. In the 200th anniversary of his birth, his historical significance, political legacy and public commemoration remain open to the most diverse interpretation.

Part of the reason lies in the varied nature of Garibaldi's own life and views, and his own careful crafting and re-crafting of them. Born on 4 July 1807, in Nice, a humble fisherman's son, he showed early republican leanings by supporting a botched uprising by the Italian nationalist, Giuseppe Mazzini.

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Many contradictory political impulses, martial symbols, nationalist yearnings and cosmopolitan ideals are embodied in his daring life

Following its failure, he fled to South America where he gained a name as a "bandit leader" and freedom fighter. This Che Guevara style reputation was only confirmed by his legendary return in 1848–9, the years of European revolutions, to defend Rome from the French and fight for Italian national unification. Garibaldi's struggle to save the Eternal City ended in glorious defeat. His heroic and ill-fated march north to save Venice from the

Austrians was also aborted and he was forced to flee again. During this disastrous flight, he lost his beloved wife, Anita, to malarial fever, an event he sometimes considered the defining tragedy of his life.



Garibaldi's wife Anita died in 1849

The heroic march of the Thousand

He resurfaced in 1860, to defy the Piedmontese statesman Cavour, and lead his "Thousand volunteers" from Liguria to Sicily, finally to defeat the Bourbons and create a new nation with Victor Emmanuel on the Italian throne. For liberal nationalists across Europe, notwithstanding such monarchical compromises, this was a moment of intense success.

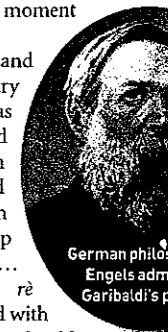
Even those cynical old communists, Marx and Engels, seemed impressed by the revolutionary leader of the "redshirts". "So, *père* Garibaldi has drubbed the Neapolitans again after all, and taken 2,000 prisoners," Engels had written admiringly to Marx, as Garibaldi stormed north through the mainland from the southern region of Calabria. "The impression the chap makes on the troops must be tremendous...

there's no denying that the *rè galantuomo* is playing his hand with a great deal of pluck if he should now go to Naples."

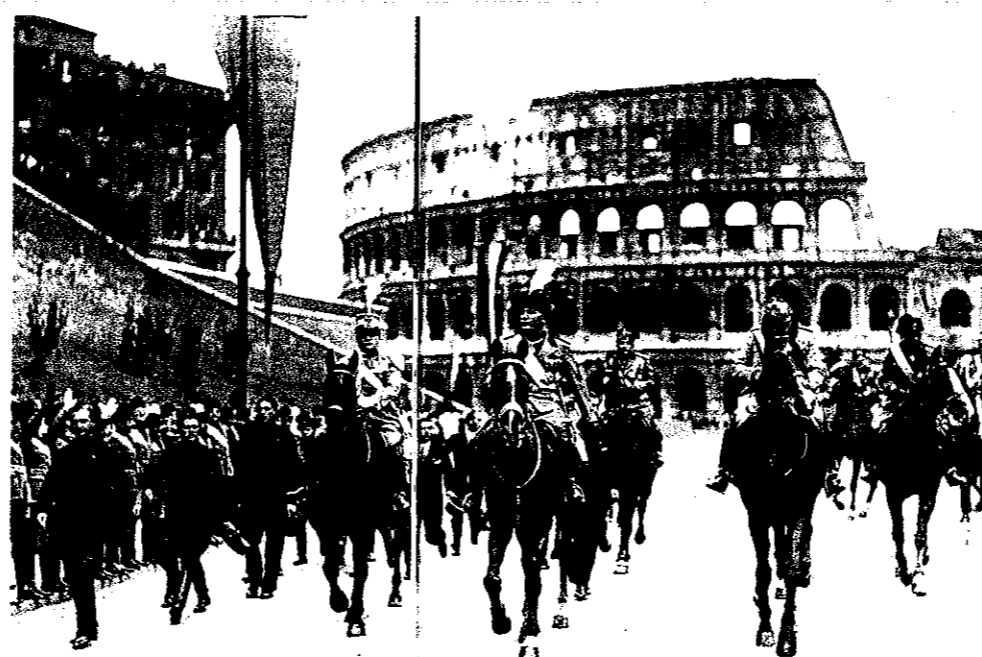
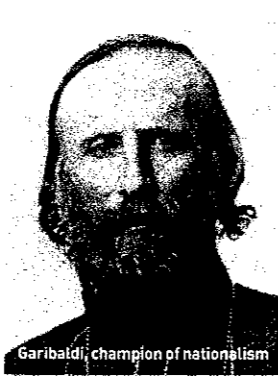
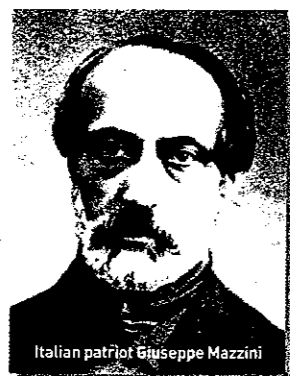
Bellicose futurist poets and Italian "ultranationalists" would later champion this martial valour. But if he was renowned as a ruthless if unconventional military man, Garibaldi was also a leading advocate of peace. Indeed he became an important figure in the League of Peace and Freedom in the 1860s, which sought to promote liberty, amity and justice within and between nations. Its supporters included John Bright, John Stuart Mill and Victor Hugo.

His decision in 1860 gracefully to cede power to Victor Emmanuel offered a new chapter to the story: as though the tough incorrigible revolutionary could now be cast as an emollient conciliator and smoother of national identity, but his later life would

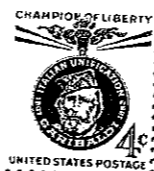
A lithograph of 1860 celebrates the triumphal entry of Garibaldi and his redshirts into Naples



German philosopher Engels admires Garibaldi's p...



Admiration for Garibaldi crosses political boundaries: Mussolini (above, in Rome, 1932) saw his blackshirts as 'descendants' of the redshirts, while the USA honoured Garibaldi in stamps, 1960



Franco in the Spanish Civil War were organised into "Garibaldi brigades", whilst communist fighting forces in the Resistance in Italy and Yugoslavia also fought under his name. Further afield, Garibaldi was to feature on postage stamps in both the US and the USSR.

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JOURNEYS

BOOKS

Rome or Death: The Obsessions of General Garibaldi by Daniel Pick (Jonathan Cape, 2005, Pimlico 2006) - this book is available from **BBC HISTORY BOOK CLUB** price £7.64, see page 67; **Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero** by Lucy Riall (Yale, 2007); **Garibaldi** by Jasper Ridley (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2001); **Garibaldi and the Making of Italy** by George Macaulay Trevelyan (Longmans, Green and Co, 1912)

A HERO'S WELCOME: GARIBALDI CONQUERS ENGLAND

In 1864 Garibaldi travelled to England and was positively mobbed. He had already enjoyed a very successful visit to Tyneside in the mid-1850s, but this time he came as a superstar of European liberalism.

An estimated 500,000 people turned up to greet him. Lord Palmerston wrote that "Garibaldi met with such a reception as no man had ever had before" and the radical, Alexander Herzen, remarked that his reception was "[Thomas] Carlyle's hero-worship being performed before our eyes". The famous "Garibaldi biscuit" was now in production (from the London-based Peak and Freen company which, ironically, went on to make the "Bourbon" as well), while numerous hagiographic biographies and romantic lithographs had turned Garibaldi into a European celebrity.

During his stay, stories of public infatuation abounded; tales that soapsuds from his basin were treasured may have been apocryphal, but red shirts did a roaring trade as did a quickly put together Garibaldi musical show. The first of two receptions held in his honour at the Crystal Palace, and which was to feature Italian music, flags and speeches in favour of the liberation of Rome and Venice, attracted 25-30,000 people.

The General was overwhelmed by letters, from bishops, princes, politicians, and working men and women, requesting his company at social events or the endorsement of their own pet projects and beliefs. He was given banquets at livery companies, made a freeman of the City of London, taken to see the Crystal Palace and shown Eton College to great applause. There were invitations from rifle clubs and working

men's associations, from lords and ladies, and northern industrialists. According to the radical *Reynold's Newspaper*, Garibaldi was "the greatest man by whom England has ever been visited". In 1865, the football club, Nottingham Forest, took red as its colour - its players even wore special red-tasselled caps.

Many people clearly fell deeply in love with the very idea of Garibaldi. During this remarkable visit, as the personal guest of the Duke of Sutherland, he met the great and the good, but Garibaldi had a classless aura, an effortless confidence and humility that awed people of all ranks. He was the champion of the liberal world, the living emblem of the fight for freedom. At the Floral Hall in Covent Garden, it was reported that feverish women seized his hands, touched his beard, his poncho, his trousers, any part of him that they could reach. Garibaldi had a special rapport with female audiences and seems to have deliberately cultivated this "constituency", largely ignored by conventional politicians of the day.

Disraeli and Queen Victoria were amongst the few not drawn into the

Red shirts did a roaring trade as did a quickly put together Garibaldi musical show

convivial atmosphere. The Queen wrote to her daughter on his departure: "Garibaldi - thank God! - is gone! It has been a very absurd and humiliating exhibition and was becoming very dangerous by the connection with Mazzini and all the worst refugees".



Garibaldi receives an ecstatic welcome to the town hall in Southampton during his trip to England

Cavour, Mazzini and Garibaldi were represented as great fathers of the nation, whose contributions were all required... to bring 'Italy' into being

also turn that image on its head again - his passionate attacks upon papal Rome and the professional political class never abating. He was never a simple "yes man": one of his great hallmarks was his perceived unpredictability. When he was roused to anger and protest, he seemed an unstoppable force; but he was equally capable of withdrawing from politics - the "anti-politician" par excellence, fond of describing himself as a simple "farmer".

This anti-politician image proved central to his popularity. According to a new book by Lucy Riall (*Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero*, Yale, 2007) he



Garibaldi, the 'simple farmer' (woodcut, 1850)

and the Risorgimento era (Resurgence - the period leading up to Italian unification) became part of a new "civic religion" designed to unify national sentiment in the face of the old ties of Catholicism and regional identity. Garibaldi became the lead candidate for public memorials. "Whether on horseback or on foot, sword in hand or pointing towards

future glory, Garibaldi replaced princes, saints and sometimes even the Madonna herself as the subject of public representation in squares all over Italy," writes Riall. "Garibaldi was to become a secular saint, a symbol of Italian national unity."

To transform him into this national myth demanded a domestication of his wild political and moral reputation. In place of a conflict of views, personalities and actions, Cavour, Mazzini and Garibaldi were shown as part of a pantheon: great fathers of the nation, whose signal contributions were all required, in supposedly complementary fashion, to bring "Italy" into being.

On 10 March 1911, the mayor of Rome, Ernesto Nathan, exalted the miracle of their joint endeavour - the apostle, warrior, king and diplomat all somehow pulling together. In carefully orchestrated gestures in 1961 (the centenary of unification), party bosses from the ruling Christian Democrats were sent off to pay homage to the tombs of Cavour, Mazzini and Garibaldi. Somehow the instigator

Garibaldi replaced princes, saints and sometimes even the Madonna herself... in squares all over Italy

of revolution, leader of "the Thousand" was made compatible with monarchy, church and capitalism. The pro-monarchist leanings of Garibaldi in the second half of his career were thus to eclipse the radicalism and iconoclasm of both his early and late years. Yet emollient commemorations in the aftermath of his death, or again, today, cannot fully blot out the sense of trouble, division, rivalry and hatred that surrounded his many exploits.

A talisman for fascists and communists alike

In the interwar period, Garibaldi remained a rallying point for right and left in Italy. The poet and "man of action", Gabriele D'Annunzio repackaged him as an "Omnipotent Duce" and fearless warrior hero. Nobody was to prove more adept than Il Duce himself at drawing the parallel. Mussolini was attracted not only to Garibaldi's dynamic military leadership and political bravado, but also his later interest in rebuilding Rome and draining the city's malarial swamps. Garibaldi's celebrated march on Rome in 1862 - *Roma o Morte* (Rome or Death) - to challenge the power of the papacy and French Emperor Napoleon III was notably imitated in Mussolini's own 1922 march to the capital.

The Italian dictator's skilfully fashioned career and Fascist ideology mimicked aspects of Garibaldi's life. In a speech in Udine in 1922, Mussolini had asked the crowd to think of Rome and help him build a "city of our spirit, a city well disciplined, disinfected of all the elements which corrupt it and disfigure it... the pulsating heart, the agile spirit of that Imperial Italy of which we dream". The blackshirts, he claimed, were the "legitimate descendants" of the redshirts and their leader.

Anti-Fascists were no less assiduous in yoking their cause to the redshirts. Italian volunteers in the fight against

