

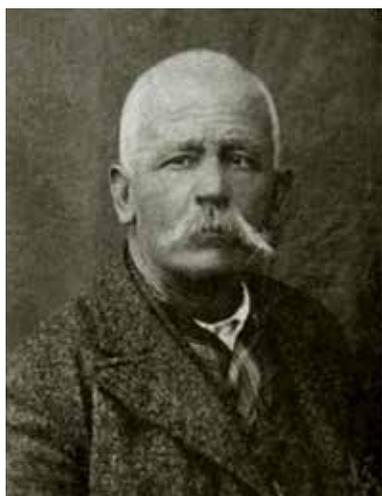
History



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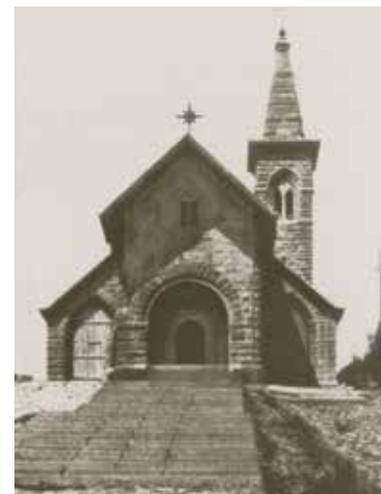
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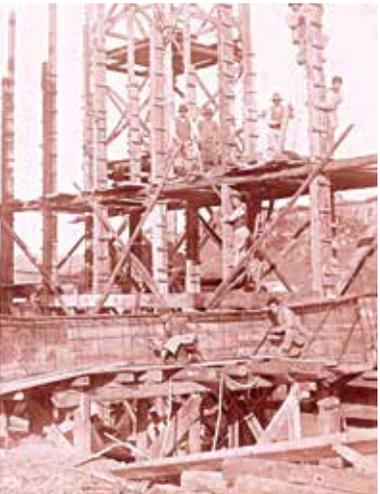
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How it all began: from a story told
by Enrico Pizzarotti

My grandfather was the first to work in the construction industry, and my father and I - together with my siblings - followed in his footsteps. The company planted its roots more than a century ago and it is impossible to mention it without recalling the distant origins that gave this vocation to the members of my family.

The story of the company begins with my grandfather Pietro Pizzarotti (1851-1908), who started out as a bricklayer and ended up as a master builder. My grandmother used to tell us that he was very talented and charismatic, a man of few words with a strong practical sense; a strict man - more with himself than with others - respected by everyone. He lived with his family in Ponte Taro, on the via Emilia, in the building which had once been the departure point of the Taro ferry, prior to the building of the bridge.

When he died, he was replaced by his son Gino who, in 1910, at the age of 22, founded the company named "Ditta Gino Pizzarotti".

To be able to judge what Gino achieved and the importance of the many works he skilfully brought to completion, it is necessary to provide some background on the period in which he was operating, from 1908 to 1935, the year in which he died, at only 48 years of age.

These were years in which national unity was still in its early days, social tensions were strong, poverty was widespread, the working day was over ten hours long, pellagra and tuberculosis were rife. They were the years of the first great strikes called by the recently founded Socialist party. Then came the years of the First World War and Gino was enrolled in the drivers' corps. The years that followed saw the founding of the Fascist party and the Communist party, the advent of the regime and, in 1929, the world economic crisis that brought the entire Western world to its knees: businesses and banks went bankrupt, investors lost all that they had, further poverty and unemployment ensued, all activity without exception ground to a halt.

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Historical photo of the “Ditta Pizzarotti Gino”.
It dates to the year 1910, when the company was founded.

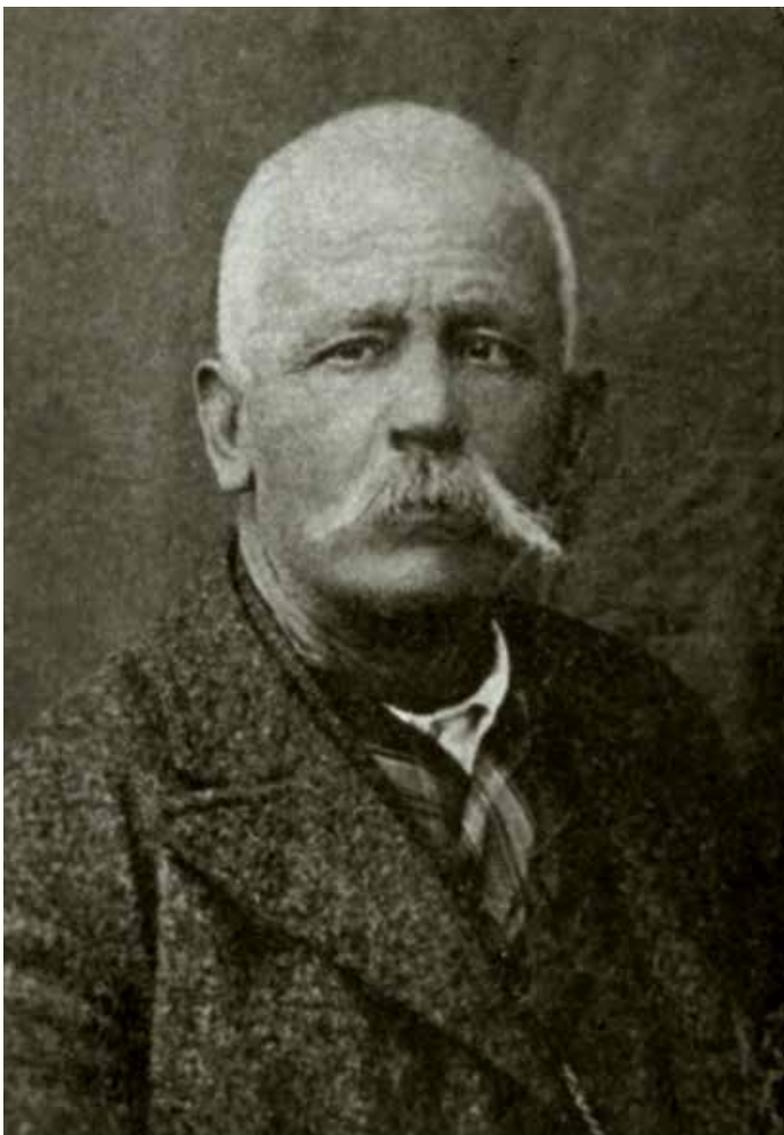




At that time, the company's equipment was really very poor: cables, pulleys, spades, picks, buckets, wheelbarrows... Horses were the only means of transport. To gain insight into Gino's personality, his far-sightedness, his broad-mindedness and his sense of humanity, it is important to know what he did at the start of his career. He purchased a farm holding of 9.5 hectares in Ponte Taro where he constructed a building complex which was, for the time in which it was conceived, a humanitarian business model. It consisted of a quadrilateral of buildings built around a large courtyard, and which also included the manor house, the dwellings of the bricklayers and cart drivers, the horse stables and cattle stalls, the company storerooms, the joiner's shop and the workshop. And this is where my brother, Pietro, and I were born, in 1911 and 1913, respectively. My father had built the complex because he wanted to be near to the people he loved; in the evenings on public holidays, especially in the winter, at Christmas and New Year, he enjoyed playing cards with his employees. There was no radio at that time and the only means of amusement was a game of cards and a glass of Lambrusco. These were unforgettable evenings for us, as children, because a close relationship of mutual respect had been established between our family and those of the employees, which continued even after the death of my father. The photograph of 1910 conveys this carefree atmosphere.

In 1919 a famous shipowner purchased the castle of Castelguelfo and proceeded to restore it and to build a vast residential complex; the works were assigned to Gino Pizzarotti. The same shipowner decided to build the small church known as the Chiesetta della Cisa. The works commenced in 1919 and were brought to completion, with considerable organisational difficulties, in 1921. The materials were transported by horse from Ponte Taro, Fornovo and Ghiare di Berceto. The 80 km journey from Ponte Taro to the Cisa pass, carrying the site equipment, lasted 3 days, one way only. My brother Pietro and I followed the bricklayers and we lived at the Cisa Pass during the summer holidays.

In the Twenties, Montecatini purchased an old plant producing chemical fertilisers for agriculture from the company Pieraghi close to the railway station of Castelguelfo. Pizzarotti became a regular supplier of Montecatini, and Gino worked at these projects without interruption until his death. And also after his death, thanks to the goodwill acquired, his heirs were called upon for the construction of special plant in the many factories of Montecatini throughout Italy, islands included, up until 1960. For the casting of the long span coverings of industrial buildings, an innovative system was developed, consisting of a mobile cambered formwork on rails. For around 40 years until the merger with Edison, Montecatini was the company's greatest source of employment. The Montecatini factories in which Pizzarotti worked up until 1959 were: Castelguelfo (1930-35), Reggio Emilia, Montemarciano (Ancona), Legnago (Verona), Piano d'Orta (Pescara), Rieti, Assisi, Barletta, Taranto, Brindisi, Porto Empedocle, Campofranco (Caltanissetta), Cagliari. Still in the Twenties, Gino built several schools, in Art Nouveau style, that still exist today.



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- 1 Pietro Pizarotti (1851-1908).
- 2 Gino Pizarotti (1886-1935).



Standing on the left: Guglielmina, Augusto, Gino.
In the foreground: Ermelinda, Appio, Bice and Pietro Pizzarotti.



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- 1 Gino, Enrico, Pietro and mother.
- 2 Pietro and Enrico with the family.

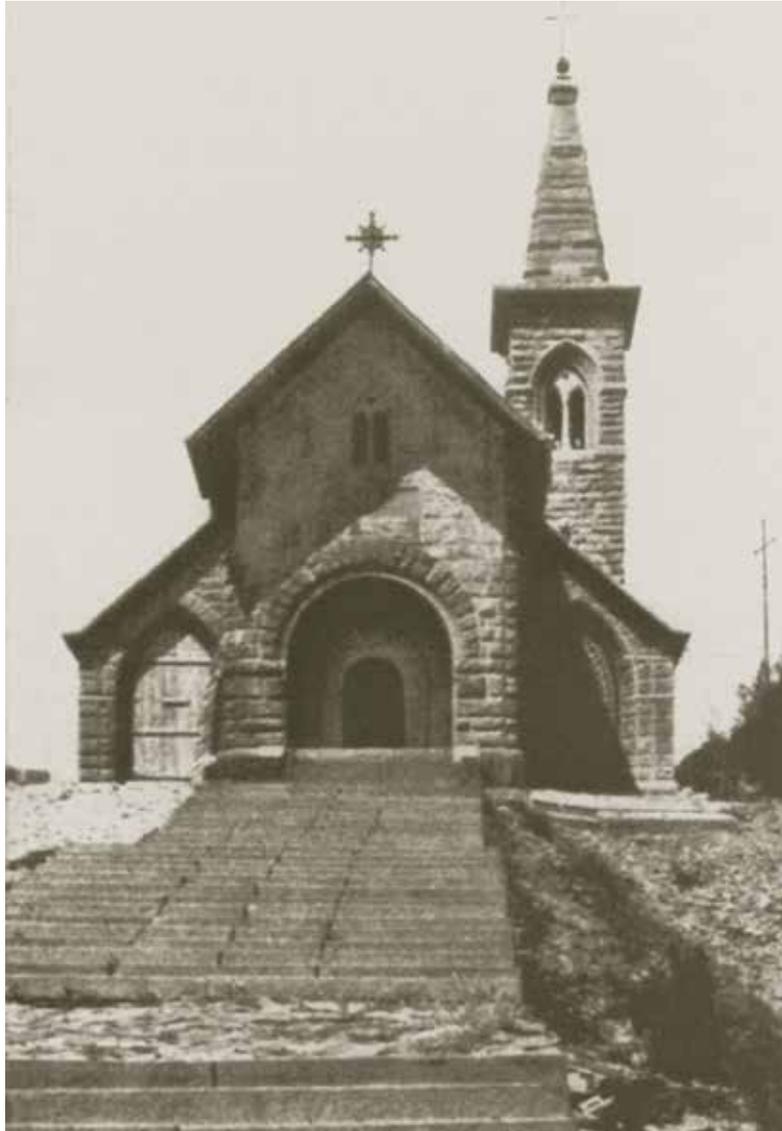


Pietro and Enrico at the Collegio Maria Luigia boarding school.

In 1929, the Government started repairing the most important highways. At that time, the only traffic on the via Emilia were horses. The iron wheels of the carriages had worn deep furrows like sunken rails.

The first automobiles, Ford and Fiat, started to appear on the roads and so the asphaltting of the busiest roads could no longer be postponed. For transportation purposes, Gino purchased from the Regio Esercito, i.e. the Army of the Kingdom of Italy, some surplus trucks from the 1915-1918 war, the only means of transport available at the time. In the morning, two or three of the stronger workers took turns to crank-start them after lighting a fire under the oil sump. At the edges of the via Emilia piles of pebbles were formed which were then crushed by mobile crushers driven, with transmission belts, by agricultural tractors; in this way, the crushed aggregates were produced for the roadbed which was then flattened by compressors. The crushed aggregates came from the Ponte Taro crushing plant.

After the via Emilia, the Cisa road, from Fornovo to Cassio was reshaped and asphalted. Quarries were created and two crushers were installed along the road. After the asphaltting work had been completed, the company gained a new contract to restore all the structures from Fornovo to the Cisa: retaining walls, guttering, stone posts, parapets etc.; the hairpin bends were also banked. In 1932, the Lecce-Gallipolli highway was repaired and asphalted; the company had already gained a reputation for the quality of its work.



The Church dedicated to the Madonna della Guardia (Our Lady of the Guard) at the Cisa Pass, built by the Impresa Pizzarotti in 1920 from a project drawn up by the architect, Lamberto Cusani.



In 1909, by order of the army of the King of Italy, Fiat studied a new multifunctional truck for transporting troops and materials, and presented the famous Fiat 15, installing for the first time on this type of vehicle a petrol pump to replace the gravity feed design. The 15 model was a roaring success and further versions were then produced the 15 Bis, named Libia, and the 15 Ter equipped with a more powerful engine.



At the start of the Great War, FIAT constructed a new truck for use alongside the 15 Ter, named the 18 BL; it met with great success in the military sector. It was, in fact, used throughout the '15-'18 war for the transportation of heavy materials behind the lines, e.g. ammunition for the artillery. This truck's contribution to victory was significant in the counteroffensive of May 1916, which halted the Austrian advance (Strafexpedition) in the Trento area. Production (20,000 units) continued and influenced other versions such as: the 18 BLR and the 18P. In the 1st World War, the FIAT 18 BL was the standard supply of numerous foreign armies, among which France and Russia. In the '40s, during the East African Campaign, the FIAT 18 BL truck was still in use, the only variant being the replacement of the solid rubber wheels with disc wheels and tyres.

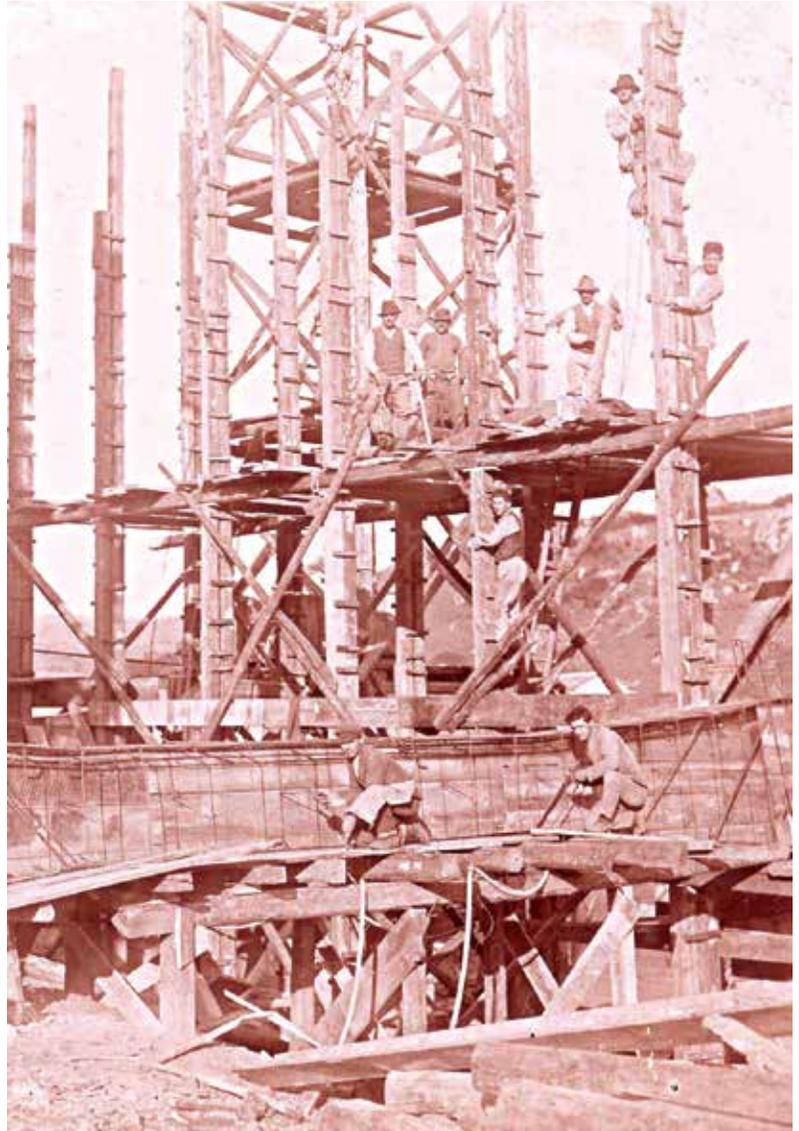
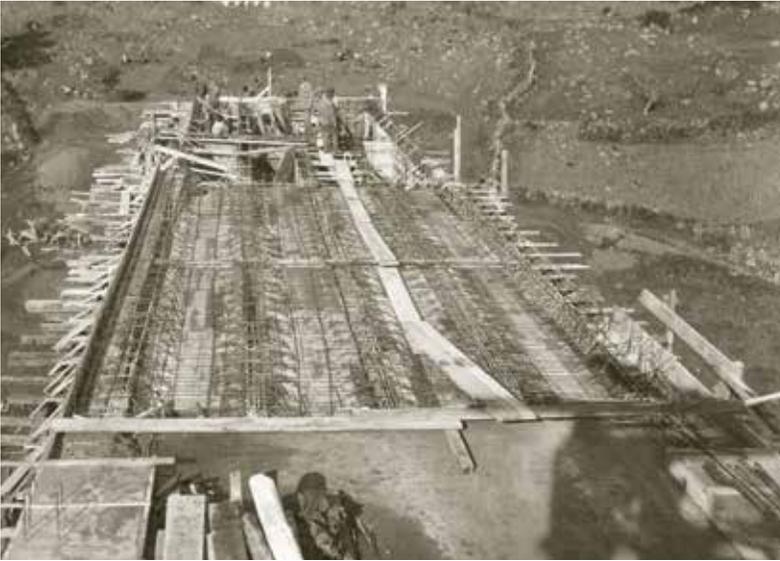
Another job I recall was the replacement of the single railway line along the Borgotaro bridge of the Pontremoli line, without suspending the train service. It was a very difficult job indeed, as lack of equipment had to be compensated by ingenuity and intelligence. Furthermore, the rail had to be replaced in one piece in the brief interval of time between one train and the next. For the implementation of these works, two wooden service bridges were built, one downline and one upline of the existing bridge. On the one downline, the new railway track was pre-assembled together with its superstructure. On the bridge upline, which had to accommodate the old track being replaced, winches were anchored at ten-metre intervals and, when operated manually in unison, they conveyed the new rail from the service bridge downline to the railway itself, and at the same time removed the old track, all in the space of 20 minutes. The train passed at a snail's pace, with its steam whistle blowing ten to the dozen. It was an unforgettable day, which was given great coverage in the national press. We repeated the same procedure for the Ostia Parmense bridge. At that time, a bridge was also built on the same railway line on the river Verde, between Pontremoli and Sarzana.

The company was also involved in snow shovelling. Now the idea might raise a smile, but in those days 60-70 cm of snow accumulated on the ground every winter without fail. Winters really were winters then, snowfalls were frequent and temperatures could drop to below minus 10 degrees. My father was contracted by the Provincial Authorities to clear the snow on the via Emilia from Ponte Taro to Fontevivo and Fontanellato, after each snowfall. An implement similar to a snowplough was drawn by three pairs of horses driven by six carters. Since the horses were not used to pulling all together at the same time, the vehicle advanced in fits and starts, amidst the cries of the cart drivers and the sound of the whip. It was the custom for the owners of the houses along the roadside to offer wine, that was not always watered down: so, on returning home in the evening the horses were very tired and the cart drivers very merry.

My father's memory really deserves respect - he died at an age in which he had the most to give, in terms of experience and business relations. He was very much respected. So much so that he was called upon in 1925, on the founding of the F.C.I.P., the Industrial Union of the time, to sit on the Provincial Entrepreneurs Committee. For us children, losing him when we had only just begun to share interests in common was a tremendous blow. We were guided by his personality and his example of industriousness, ability and level-headedness in all aspects of his entrepreneurial exploits.

In 1929, in order to prepare the crushed aggregates for the asphaltting of the Via Emilia, my father installed the crushing and washing plant of Ponte Taro, where the prefab production plant now stands. In order to be able to construct it, he requested a building permit from the public works department for the land on which the plant still stands today, which became the property of the company at the end of the Fifties.

I am particularly attached to the memory of the crushing plant - it was the first plant of this kind in the region. For us children it was an asset of enormous importance. It was the only asset of value bequeathed to us and in fact, my brother Pietro and I started off from here in 1935, by selling the production of the crushing plant. We then started selling bitumen, tar, pitch, bituminous emulsion and tar paper, and as a result we became involved in works in the construction and road building sector in which we could use the aforementioned materials. We coped as best we could because money was scarce and the period in which we started up was one of the most tragic: from 1936 (year of the East African Campaign) till 1945, Italy lived in a state of belligerence. There was a marked slowing down of activities, especially from 1943-1944, when the works virtually ground to a halt due to the bombs that rained down daily on the Taro bridge. During this period, due to lack of energy sources, the ovens were inoperative and we started, thanks to the crushing plant, to manufacture simple products as an alternative to concrete (bricks, tiles and pipes): the tiny seed planted was later to bloom into the prefab production plant. Thanks to the crushing plant, we managed to survive the war and enter the reconstruction phase, which brought us work and wealth. In actual fact, the crushing plant is the only real connecting link between the past and the present, the "baton" passed down through four generations, from Gino to Pietro and Enrico, to Paolo and to his children.



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- 1 Borgotaro, Parma. Italy. Structure and foundations of the downline service bridge.
- 2 Workers busy on the bridge side.
- 3 Structure of the upline service bridge.



Crushing Plant at Ponte Taro, Parma. Italy. End of the '20s.
Built for the purpose of supplying the crushed aggregates used for the asphaltting of the via Emilia.

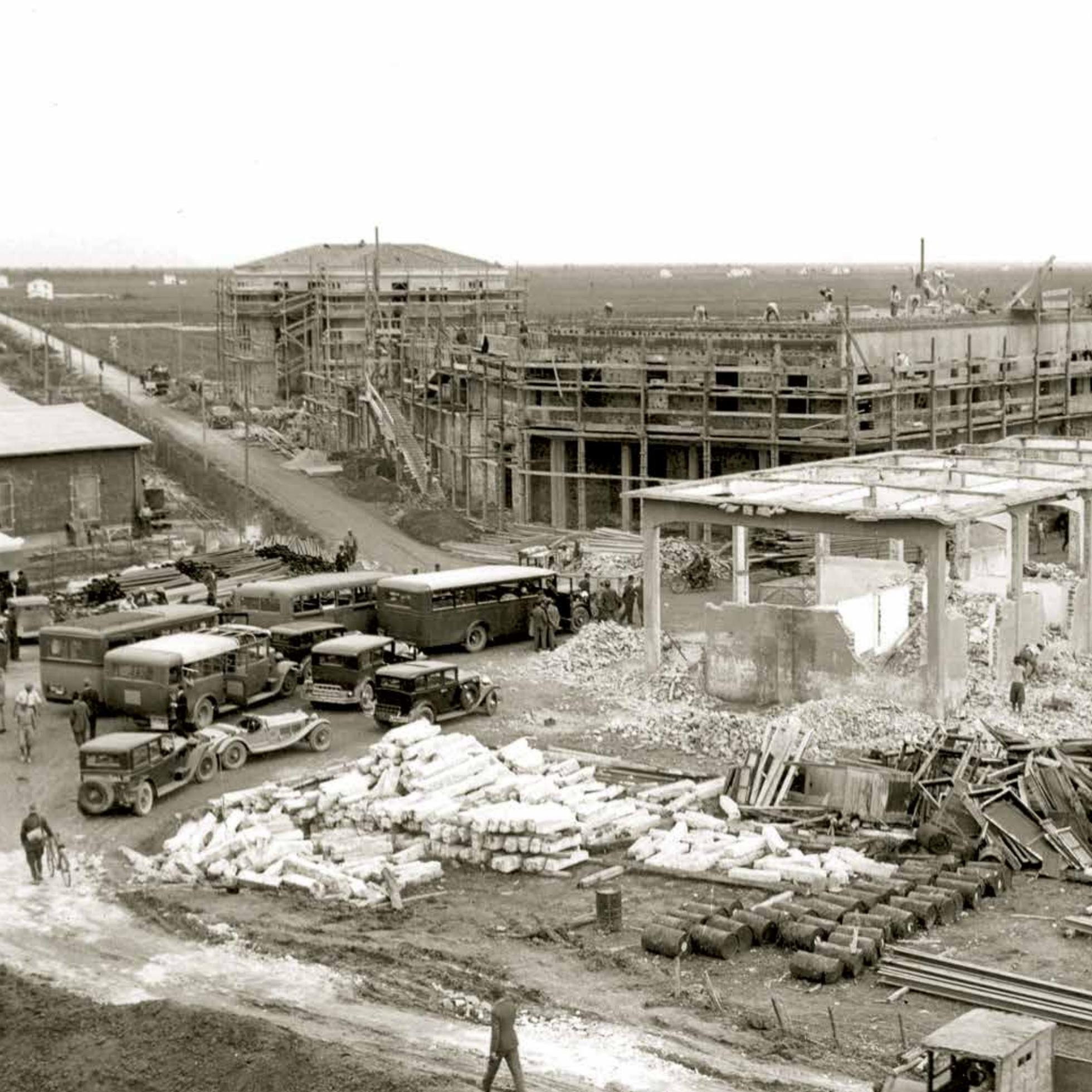
During the war we did not even have any equipment - we were still digging with spades. We worked with wheel barrows; there weren't any cranes. Houses were built to a maximum of two floors because moving the materials with cables was very heavy work. The bricklayers' apprentices carried the materials on their backs, which they ruined as a result. Then the Americans arrived with their equipment which had the capacity to carry six cubic metres of material. At that time, at Ponte Taro, we acquired our first tracked excavator and used it for many years.

In the aftermath of the war, a period rich in opportunities ensued in which we launched successful initiatives and, in a relatively short time, the company began to achieve success outside of the provincial sphere executing extremely important works for various central government departments. The main contracts in that period were for Montecatini, roadworks for the provincial and municipal authorities of Parma, for ANAS (National Highways Authority) and for numerous civilian and military airports, among which: Aviano (Pordenone), Rivolto (Udine), Treviso, Elmas (Cagliari), Alghero (Sassari), Albenga (Savona), Pratica di Mare (Rome), S. Donato (Piacenza).

At the end of the war, the Impresa Pizzarotti purchased from the Americans - who were technologically more advanced in the road construction industry - a small Barber Green plant for producing hot bitumen and for spreading it on the roads. The hot road surface proved to be better, more durable and economical. It marked the end of old paving systems which had consisted of the spreading of aggregates and sand and the spraying of emulsion.

Impresa Pizzarotti was one of the first Italian companies to use this new technology, and to take things one step further by inventing a patented system known as AES, by means of which it was possible to spread the bitumen coating hot, thereby eliminating undulations. This system was used to reshape the via Emilia between Castelguelfo and Fidenza: the car seemed to fly over the asphalt!

Parma, Italy. The years following the First World War.
Reconstruction of the areas struck by the bombing.



My brother travelled many times to Russia, Czechoslovakia and Sweden; at that time the countries of Eastern and Northern Europe were in the vanguard in prefabrication technology. He returned, full of enthusiasm, from Sweden where instead of blocks of flats they would build small houses that cost much less than those constructed in Italy in the traditional manner.

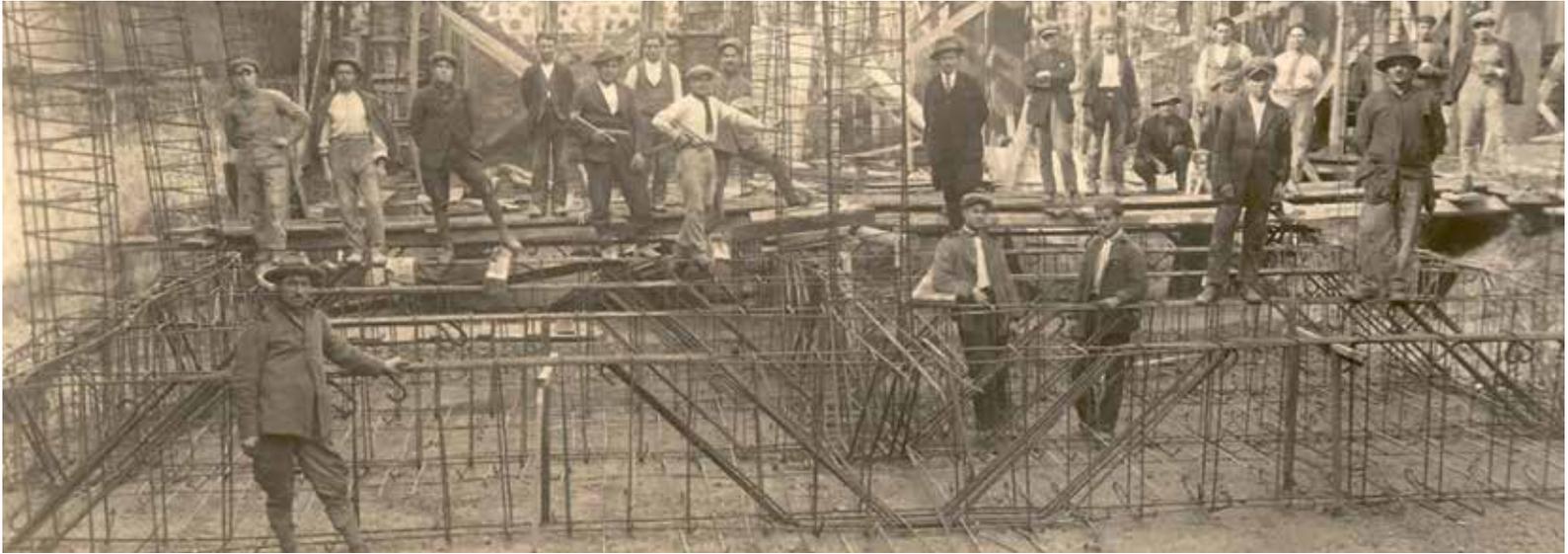
I went to negotiate with a large Swedish company from which I purchased the patent for the construction of "Bauherz" (which means "core of the house"); it was a monolithic prefabricated building cast in a single block - external and internal walls, ceiling, floor - with all the electrical and water systems incorporated, with kitchen, sinks, washing machines and concrete tanks already installed. Also in this case, Impresa Pizzarotti had struck gold!

Up until 1959 my brother Pietro and I worked together: I dealt with the technical part; I travelled all over Italy to supervise the works in progress. My brother was responsible for administration and the commercial part, i.e. it was his job to procure the works and he really was very good at it. He maintained ongoing relationships with the government Ministries and with Montecatini. These relations had to be continuously cultivated due to the changing of managers, but he knew what he was about.

We worked extremely hard, as did our employees, even on till midday on Sundays; then everyone would go home with a tray of cakes.

My brother Pietro died in 1966 at only 55 years of age. Now he would have been 99 years old, he was 18 months older than me.





- 1 Workers at work. Employees in 1920.
- 2 Operating equipment during asphaltting.
- 3 Asphaltting of the provincial road network of Parma.