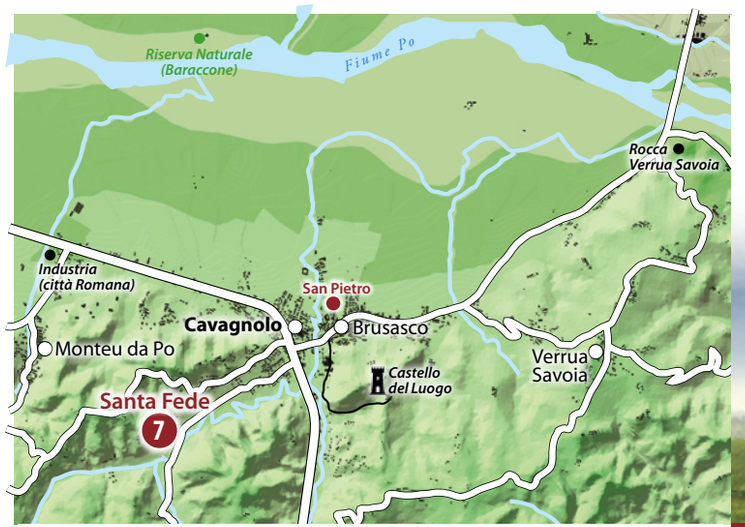

The numbering of the church refers to the
General Map of the romanesque network of the hills (RRC)

How to get to and visit
the Abbey of Santa Fede:
Via Santa Fede 92, Cavagnolo (TO).
GPS coordinates: Lat. 45.14355778 | Long. 8.03670163

Open on the first Sunday of each month in the period from April to October, supervised by RRC volunteers.
Daily from 8:00 to 20:00.
Information: +39 3469749680 +39 3478959936
www.comune.cavagnolo.to.it

Local attractions around Cavagnolo:
- The Church of San Secondo at the Cemetery, Cavagnolo;
- Villa Martini Bonaudo, Cavagnolo;
- Church of St. Peter, Brusasco (RRC);
- Brusasco Castle;
- Natural reserve of special interest at the confluence of the Dora Baltea (Località Baraccone);
- Roman City of Industria, Monteu da Po;
- Fortress, La Rocca, Verrua Savoia.

Local events and shows:
- Patron saint's day, first Sunday in August, Cavagnolo;
- July on the Square, the whole of the month of July, Cavagnolo.

inCollina®
tourism in the heart of Piedmont

Information points and contacts:
Albugnano (AT), Abbey of Vezzolano

tel. +39 3331365812
infopoint@turismoincollina.it

www.turismoincollina.it
www.vezzolano.it

Facebook: turismo InCollina

RETE ROMANICA DI COLLINA®

Romanesque network of the hills
promotes knowledge and use of the romanesque heritage of the local areas between the River Po and the Monferrato Hills.

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TRANSROMANICA The Romanesque Routes of European Heritage

With the support of:

Municipalities and Parishes of Albugnano, Andezeno, Brusasco, Castelnuovo Don Bosco, Cavagnolo, Cerreto, Cortazzone, Marentino, Mombello di Torino, Montafia, Montiglio Monferrato, Tonengo.

FONDAZIONE Cassa di Risparmio di Asti

Texts and photos by arch. Sara Inzerra, revision 2018 (Associazione Culturale Athena) - Translation: Wall Street English, Chieri (TO)

Abbey of Santa Fede

Cavagnolo

7

RETE ROMANICA® DI COLLINA
Abbeys and churches between the River Po and Monferrato

Description of the local area

The village of Cavagnolo lies in the northern part of the hills of Monferrato, about 40 kms from Turin. The village centre, on the river plain of the Cerrina Valley, straddles the main provincial road SP590 and by passing through and going straight on after the roundabout for another two kilometres amidst meadows and woods, you reach the complex of the Santa Fede church. The church itself is not immediately in view; you have to turn right again and follow the narrow road bordering a modern building, up to the top of the hill.

Historical details

The *Monasterii sancte Fidis de Cabagnoli*, closely dependent on the French Monastery of Sainte Foy de Conques, was already in existence in the XIIth century on the lands controlled by the Marquises of Monferrato, as shown by the documentary research carried out up to now.

In a document from 1164, the emperor Frederick Barbarossa confirmed that the lands of Cavagnolo were the possession of William the Elder, Marquis of Monferrato, and also mentioned the existence of the Priory of Santa Fede. It appears regularly in the lists of churches in the Vercelli area from 1298 to 1440. In 1372 the complex was at its most splendid, after donations by the Marquis John II of Monferrato. During the 1500s the Abbey underwent changes in fortune: it was downgraded to a rural church and cemetery and then abandoned in extremely poor condition. In the mid-1700s the priory was appropriated by the diocese of Acqui and the "palace" was used as a summer residence by Monsignor Roero di Cortanze. When it was given back to the diocese of Casale, a programme of maintenance work continued on the structure. In the mid-1800s, as a result of the law on suppression of religious orders, it passed to the State, which sold it at a public auction to private owners for use as stables. In the 1870s, E. Arborio Mella verified its state of neglect and used his systematic studies to focus attention on this Piedmontese romanesque complex, which today remains one of the most intriguing for researchers and

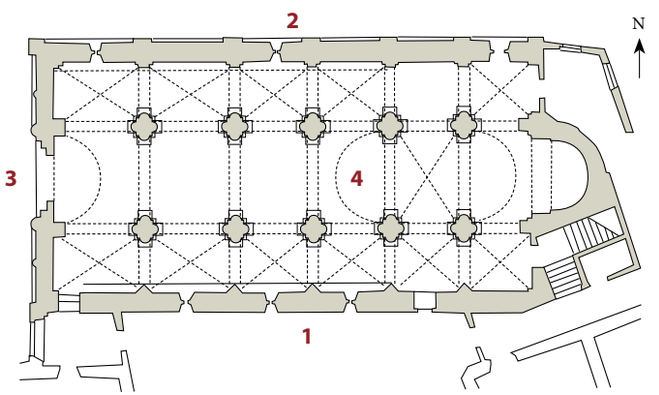
critics in this field. In 1881 it was bought by Don G.B. Frattini of Cottolengo and in 1886 the Ministry of Public Instruction added it to the list of national monuments, because of its considerable special features of art history. In 1895, the complex passed to the Marist Fathers, who used it as an Apostolic school and reception centre, until 2010. At present the church belongs to the Parish of Cavagnolo in the Diocese of Casale and its opening hours are supervised by the Siloe Community, while the Local Council Administration promotes it through cultural and tourist projects.

Description

The church is formed of three naves with one central semicircular apse; the other two small side apses were documented in 1724. The transept does not extend beyond the side walls and the bell tower is square. The walls are constructed in blocks of stone and bricks.

1. The south facade has been completely absorbed into the recent construction, which has retained a few elements of the bishop's palace within it.

2. From the north side there is access by a small gate and details of the antique structure can still be seen, as well as the new sacristy that has been incorporated onto the original walls of the apse.



3. The main facade, with projecting tiers, represents a magnificent entrance doorway and has recently been restored, to close the cracks in the sculptured lintel that had been monitored during the period it was under Official Superintendency; above this there is a double-arched window dating from the 1890s and a Lombard band below the roof gable. The entrance with its overlying round arch, widely splayed, is set up on half-columns and its first layer is divided into twelve interlaced fields, with monstrous, geometric sculpted zoomorphic figures and a cross at the top of the arch.

Within the half moon there is a Christ Pantocrator inset in an almond shape and supported by two angels. There are small columns in the door jambs with sculpted capitals, all in stone.

Above the capitals of the squat columns placed on the outside and embellished with detailed sculptures, there are bas-reliefs of two griffons. The sculptures unite the typical romanesque repertoire of monsters and bizarre figures with the classicism of the Roman and Paleochristian world.

The latest research reveals the presence of two building sites in the same period, with stonemasons of different abilities creating the artistic elements in the area of the facade and the apse.

4. The interior is divided into three naves: the largest has its original barrel vault, while the two smaller side naves have cross vaults and are separated by pillars with semi-columns topped by magnificent stone capitals. These are sculpted with subjects on themes of plants, animal figures and human heads. The semi-dome over the apse has three single openings and at its centre an altar composed from a merger of different parts. In the final span of the right-hand side nave, a fresco can be seen of the Madonna on the throne, the Child and two saints, the only painted feature from the 1800s. The alternating white of stone and red bricks, together with the mouldings in billettes or damier patterns enrich the appealing harmony and essence of the setting.

Curious fact

On the stones of the facade, a number of incomplete antique inscriptions can be seen, covered by columns or by protruding elements, including two dedicated to a certain Prior Rolando.