



1:80000 scale. Map created on Inkatlas.com. Copyright OpenStreetMap contributors (openstreetmap.org), OpenTopoMap (CC-BY-SA), 2021.

The numbering of the church refers to the **General Map of the Romanesque Hills Route**.

### How to get to and visit

#### the church of Madonna della Neve:

Rebrondata district, Castell'Alfero (AT)

GPS Coordinates: Lat. 44.99629 | Long. 8.1915239

Open the first Sunday of each month in the period from April to October, supervised by the volunteers.

On request on the other days.

Informations: +39 0141406611 +39 3387665071

[www.comune.castellalfero.at.it](http://www.comune.castellalfero.at.it)

#### Local attractions in and around Castell'Alfero:

- Church of San Secondo, Cortazzone;
- Church of Santi Nazario e Celso, Montechiaro d'Asti;
- Residence of the Counts Amico and the 'L Ciar Ethnographic Museum in the castle cellars;
- Parish church of Santi Pietro e Paolo, Castell'Alfero;
- Rose garden of the Surprise, Serraperno district;
- Ciabot del Gianduja, Callianetto;
- Parish church of Annunziata, Callianetto;
- Gamba Botti factory, Castell'Alfero

#### Local events and shows:

- Open air festival - Viviverde, Castell'Alfero, 25 april;
- Castels open to the public;
- Enogastronomy fair - Golosaria Monferrato;

To know all the events: [www.comune.castellalfero.at.it](http://www.comune.castellalfero.at.it).



*tourism in the heart of Piedmont*

Social Promotion Association

### Information point and contacts:

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#### The Romanesque Hills Route

promotes knowledge and use of the romanese heritage of the local areas between the river Po and Monferrato.

With the collaboration of:



With the support of:

Municipalities and Parishes of Albugnano, Andezeno, Aramengo, Berzano di San Pietro, Brusasco, Buttigliera d'Asti, Casalborgone, Castagneto Po, Castell'Alfero, Castelnovo don Bosco, Cavagnolo, Cerreto d'Asti, Cocconato, Cortazzone, Lauriano, Marentino, Mombello di Torino, Montafia, Montechiaro d'Asti, Montiglio Monferrato, Portacomaro, San Sebastiano da Po, Tigliole, Tonengo.

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Translation: Wall Street English, Chieri (TO)



# Church of Madonna della Neve

Castell'Alfero

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Abbeys and churches between the river Po and Monferrato



## Description of the local area

The church stands in isolation, surrounded by trees, about 2 km from the town, at a point where the road passes over the ridge of the hills running along the right bank of the river Versa; it stands near the northern edge of the local territory, bordering on the neighbouring municipality of Frinco.

The church stands at a point where a side road once passed from the Via Francigena, an important part of the road network in the Asti area. In the land registry of Castell'Alfero for the year 1398 the church called 'S. Maria de Viallo' appears as a road reference and the area was actually called 'Viale' or 'Viallo' in ancient times.



## Historical details

The first evidence of the existence of the church dates back to a document issued by Pope Adrian IV in 1156, attesting to the existence of three fiefs, each attached to a church, one of which was Santa Maria. The local area was once populated by the inhabitants of Viallo and Guarabbio, but in 1494 there was only a hermit living in the church, since the two settlements had disappeared as a result of the inhabitants moving to Castell'Alfero.

At the end of the XIIIth century, following incursions by the people of Monferrato, the inhabitants of San Pietro moved into the hills, to live in the fortified Castrum Alferii. The village remained loyal to the township of Asti and played a part in its historical affairs while enjoying its privileges until the 1500s, when the House of Savoy gave it away as a fiefdom, first to the Germonio then the Amico family. Although it passed through periods of neglect, the church was never totally abandoned, which can be seen from the many renovations carried out over the centuries.

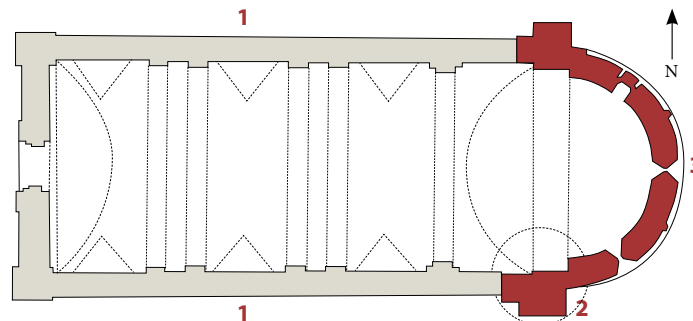
In 1866 it was appropriated by the government and then sold at public auction on 23 June 1868. After being reclaimed by the village faithful with pious oblations, it was sold on 14 August 1869 to the township, on condition that it was preserved for worship. After renovations in 2000, it was reopened in the spring of 2019, to help celebrate the First Romanesque Day in Piedmont.



## Description

With its tastefully colourful walls, the exquisite sculptures adorning its single-pane windows and capitals and its unique bell tower, this church ranks among the most important rural Romanesque buildings in the Asti area. It was built with a rectangular floor plan, measuring 5.5 x 9.8 m, using sandstone blocks alternating with brickwork for the side walls and apse; while the gabled façade, which has been renovated several times, is now partially plastered. It has undergone various renovations over time and this has partly altered its primitive features, except for the south-facing bell tower and especially the apse, which have both preserved their original Romanesque impression.

- 1. The side walls** consist of a continuous alternation of terracotta and sandstone, forming harmoniously varied layers. Chequered patterns are inserted at various heights. The same wall pattern found in the apse can also be seen in the church of Santa Fede in Cavagnolo and in the bell tower of the church of Santi Nazario e Celso in Montechiaro d'Asti.
- 2. The bell tower** is the only one in the area with a round section and is a somewhat rare example among Romanesque towers in general; at irregular intervals it has bands of sandstone breaking up the continuity of the masonry; the bell housing is in brickwork, with four wide rectangular openings. The construction of the bell tower has been dated to around 1155, as for the apse.
- 3. The semicircular apse** is framed by two flat half pilasters and separated into three vaults by two thin half-columns with acan-



thus leaf-topped capitals. It has a crowning frieze of hanging arches resting on shelves carved with various motifs and, just above the arches, a band of terracotta forming a 'sawtooth'. In the centre of each vault there is an elegant single-pane window with the façade of the arch finely carved in a single block of stone. The doorposts are also cut from a monolith and worked into columns with capitals. The north facing opening is not decorated. The central opening is triple-arched, with the central arch resting on columns with capitals carved in various styles. The most decorated is on the south side; this is more elaborate than the central one, having motifs above it, and it features a fourth arch resting on jambs with a capital. The window on the north side has been filled in and



the niche created on the inside of the church houses a statue of Sant'Anna. The interior is covered by a barrel vault and decorated, in the area of the absidal conch, by an exquisite fresco showing Christ, surrounded by the four evangelists, and scenes of the Crucifixion and Descent painted on the inside walls. There is also an oil painting by Michelangelo Pittatore, late 19th century, showing the Madonna and Child on a landscape background. The altar is in stuccoed brickwork imitating marble and there is a wooden tabernacle; various ex-voto paintings are kept in the church.

## Interesting fact

The place name of Castell'Alfero is a reminder of the existence of a fortified construction even earlier than the XIIIth century associated with a person named Alferio. The village represents one of the most significant examples in the Asti area of Monferrato of a castle town, because it still retains its Ricetto and Castle. The mediaeval plan of the settlement is still clearly visible in the original nucleus of the village. The ramparts that enclosed the fortress still have some sections visible, especially in the vicinity of the ancient entrances. One of these, the south gate, features a long flight of steps and an arch in exposed brickwork. The whole fortress is encircled by a panoramic walkway atop the walls. The village was the birthplace of Giovanni Battista De Rolandis (1774-1796), the first martyr of the Risorgimento, to whom the Italian national flag (the Tricolore) is attributed, and of Giuseppe Maria De Rolandis (1793-1848), a scientist who, together with Jean-François Champollion, interpreted the hieroglyphics of the Rosetta Stone.