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

How to get to and visit

the church of San Martino:

within the cemetery of Buttiglieria d'Asti (AT).

GPS Coordinates: Lat. 45.0153607 | Long. 7.9560328

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 3341113795 / +39 0119921812

www.comune.buttiglieria.at.it

Local attractions in and around Buttiglieria d'Asti:

- Bell tower of the parish church (arch. M. L. Quarini);
- Confraternity of San Michele (arch. B. A. Vittone);
- Church of Sant'Eusebio, Castelnuovo don Bosco;
- Church of San Lorenzo, Mombello di Torino;
- Colle Don Bosco, Castelnuovo don Bosco;
- Museum of Mamma Margherita, Capriglio.

Local events and shows:

- Le Contrade del Freisa Fair, 1st May, Buttiglieria d'Asti;
- Patron Saint's Festival of San Bernardo with show evening fireworks, August 20, Buttiglieria d'Asti.



Social Promotion
Association

Information point and contacts:

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Facebook: turismo InCollina

Instagram: reteromanicadicollina



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, Buttiglieria d'Asti, Casalborgone, Castagneto Po, Castell'Alfero, Castelnuovo 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.

Texts: prof. Elso Gramaglia. Photos by Associazione InCollina © 2020

Translation: Wall Street English, Chieri (TO)



Church of San Martino

Buttiglieria d'Asti

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Abbeys and churches between
the river Po and Monferrato

Description of the local area

The church of San Martino is situated almost in the middle of the cemetery area of the village of Buttigliera, in flat countryside near the village. The church was in fact originally the parish church of the village of Mercuriolo. When the farming village disappeared and its population moved inside the walls of the new municipality, the cemetery was developed in the area and the church was given a new role. All sources agree on acknowledging the area occupied by the church (Marcarolo area) as the lands of ancient Mercuriolium, a castle village that disappeared in the last decades of the XVth century. The cemetery chapel of San Martino is the oldest church in the area of Buttigliera. It probably dates back to the Carolingian era (774-887), when the Franks dominated northern Italy. It is common knowledge, in fact, that large numbers of them settled around Asti, especially on the plain of Buttigliera and Villanova, as may be deduced from the old place names found locally: Subrí (Solbrito), Spuní (Supponito), Busnì (Bosnito), Mainí (Mainito), Luansí (Lovencito), etc., are composed of an anthroponym and a suffix of Franconian tradition.



Historical details

The first documentary evidence of the chapel dates back to 1034. In that year the Benedictine Abbey of San Silvestro di Nonantola (Modena), sold his lands around Chieri and Asti by deed of sale to the Counts of Pombia; including Riva, Oviglia and, near Buttigliera, the village of Bosnito, the woods of Celere (Celle), la curtis (court) near the Traversola stream (which can be localised as Mercuriolium, a short distance from the present day urban centre of Buttigliera) with the annexed church dedicated to San Martino. In the first half of the XIIth century, the Counts of Biandrate, descendants of the Counts of Pombia and ex-crusaders to the Holy Land who were also lords of Mercuriolo, donated the chapel to the hospital Order of San Giovanni di Gerusalemme, which had been founded during the first crusade to help pilgrims travelling to the holy lands. The hospital built in the grounds of the church of San Martino, just as any other Jerusalemite hospice, offered accommodation and medical care to the poor and to pilgrims travelling along the roads



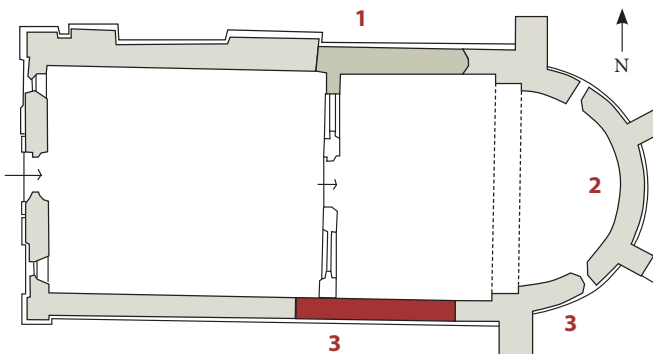
of the Villanova and Buttigliera plain. From the years 1264-1269 onwards, the time of the founding of the villa nova of Buttigliera, Mercuriolo began to go into decline and by the XVth century the village had totally disappeared. The chapel of San Martino remained the property of the trust. In 1799, when the Order of San Giovanni was suppressed, it passed to the Municipality, which later decided, in 1876, to renovate the façade and altar. A wall was also built to separate the presbytery from the hall and the frescoes in the apse, most of which had deteriorated, were renovated.

Description

The affairs of this building seem rather complex and hard to interpret. The techniques applied to the south wall are different from those of the north wall and the apse. In the first, the bi-chrome interlacing displays greater mastery of the art of building and confirms the church as belonging to the 'school of Monferrato'.

1. The troubled masonry of the **north wall** is the result of a series of renovations. Here the central part seems to be the oldest, on account of the use of common materials (pebbles and bricks) with tiles and fragments of amphoras from the Roman period, also laid out in 'fishbone' rows, but somewhat irregularly and with very thick mortar joints. The two filled in windows with arches in rough ashlar stone, alternating with elements of clay tiles of approximate shape are crudely constructed and of unusual size compared to the local churches.

2. The **apse**, with a semi-circular layout and built with a regular interlacing of bricks, belongs to a later stage, around the mid-1400s. On the interior of the church, at the height of the dome of the apse, there is plastering with fragments of frescoes, dating from 1454 but



unfortunately no longer legible. They probably show San Martino of Tours with a red cloak and San Bernardo of Menton, Bishop of Aosta. In the upper area above the bands of polychrome cornices, a Blessing Christ in a Mandorla is seen between the symbols of the evangelists. Presumably this construction of the apse is a replacement for a previous structure, contemporary with the initial building stage, as the recycling of the stone lintels over the windows might demonstrate. An inventory with drawings dated 1751 shows a previous façade with a double pitched roof, including between the two buttresses. The arched door, inserted into a slightly protruding doorway, was flanked by two rectangular windows and had an oculus above it. In the present day façade, built in 1876 and designed by G. Ferrando, an engineer from Turin, the same elements were employed as for the original construction (doorway, windows, buttresses), reinterpreted from a sharply neo-Romanesque angle.



Interesting fact

3. All along the south wall and in the apse, there are a large number of inscriptions, in Latin or in Italian, some corroded and illegible, dating back to the XVIth - XIXth centuries, mostly relating to the deceased of the village. Some of them refer to calamitous events, such as the plague of 1522 (Anno Domini 1522 maxima pestis vigeat Butiglerie); the collapse of a section of the ancient mediaeval walls of Buttigliera, that led to the deaths of six women (1544 24 martii pars una meniarum occidit numerum mulierum 6); or hailstorms (1557 die 24 maii tempestavit). The oldest of these inscriptions dates back to the XIth century or the following one and can be seen on the south wall. It indicates the burial place of the priests who officiated in the church of Mercuriolo: Hic iacent sepulti sacerdotes Dei.

