

## The *pieve* of Arbizzano and its fourteenth century portal

Arbizzano was the seat of a *pieve* (though its importance was undoubtedly less than that of Negrar). Dedicated to Saint Peter, it possesses a fine portal that represents the remains of a long since disappeared Romanesque temple, referred to in a document as far back as 1056. The present building was built towards the end of the seventeenth century.

Arbizzano's rectory is also very old, its south and west walls being typically Romanesque. The house is built of regular tuff blocks. Still visible on the first floor of the south-facing façade, there are three fragments of large cambered windows with arches of tuff ashlar. On the ancient west facade the upper part is still clearly visible with four ancient windows like those described above.

The bell tower has been rebuilt on a number of occasions. The base was medieval, the middle section dating from the beginning of the sixteenth century and the topmost part, in better condition, from more recent times. In 1936 the bell tower was however knocked down and another built to the design of the engineer Benciolini.

The *pieve* of Arbizzano still conserves a fine small fourteenth century portal with one of the best examples of late medieval sculpture in the Valpolicella. The sculpture is obviously an erudite rather than popular work, very likely by one of the stone-cutters active in the creation of the Scaliger Arches in the city of Verona.

The portal is a survivor from the destruction of the original ancient church and was set in the facade of the new one where its truly special plastic friezes stand out so well against the present plaster. Vine shoots, bunches of grapes, masks, fabulous creatures, slender branches, acanthus leaves and acorns are figure in the elegant work of the highly skilled stone-cutter who drew on diverse forms of inspiration both on the front and splay of the portal over which extends a small hanging arched porch also decorated with curled leaves.

The *pieve* has managed to conserve its twelfth century bass-relief double *Crucifixion*, and a magnificent fourteenth century reliquary with a triptych of paintings. The latter artefact came from the former monastery of Sant'Antonio al Corso in Verona. When the monastery closed it was handed to the second Master of San Zeno and is presently set in wooden frames dating from 1756, bearing an inscription to the effect that the work was brought from Verona to Arbizzano. At the centre of the triptych there is a *Pietà* and around it, on a gold background, some scenes and other figures referring to the relics container within. Small figures, also on a gold background, adorn the two side paintings that are actually doors that could originally be closed in front of the central image of the triptych. From among the figures it is possible to identify, among other saints, a *St. John decollate*, the *Innocents*, the *Apostles*, *Benedict*, *Mary Magdalene*, *Gregory*, *Jerome*, *Remigio*, *Blaise*, *Desire*, *Felicity*, *Juliana*, *Secondina*, *Secondo* and *Robert*.