

The pieve of San Floriano and Romanesque sculptures

At the end of the Marano valley, in the heart of Valpolicella, we find the *pieve* of San Floriano. This must be one of the most beautiful Romanesque churches in the whole of the Veronese region. It began life where there was a pagan cemetery, as can be readily seen by the abundant use, in its construction, of Roman marble and stone, including the use of two large memorial stones, while other remains from funeral rites are aligned along the path running alongside the church leading to the main Valpolicella road.

The church that currently stands here was built in the twelfth century but two Berengarian charters of the year 905 already make reference to the presence of a *pieve*. The building has a Romanesque façade with several sloping roofs, is made entirely in tuff and is essentially still intact.

The twelfth century bass-relief work sculpted into the tuff was originally part of the church's crowning frieze, and is now in the south side wall, then be unfortunately almost all hidden between the vaulting and the cloister roof in the seventeenth century. These friezes are therefore the remains of a complex system of decoration running the along the whole length of the facade, including motifs of plants, animals and scenes from the Holy Scriptures, as indeed is typical of all Veronese Romanesque.

The interior of the church was reworked on a number of occasions up to 1743, steadily and radically losing its Romanesque character, where even the original capitals to the columns were recarved or replaced. Only work carried out over the last fifty years has revealed how worthwhile it would be to restore the Romanesque building to view. As this has been done the arched lintels made up of limestone ashlar roughly alternating in a play of reds and pinks, and the under arches and their painted decoration have been brought into view.

At the church's northern end, beyond the seventeenth century cloisters, there is an imposing bell tower, scored along the middle on each side by a long pilaster strip and divided in two by two rows of small hanging arches. While the base of the tower is in stone, including many recycled Roman elements, its height is provided by alternate rows of tuff ashlar and brickwork ending with the terracotta belfry itself with its mullioned windows separated by their small stone columns. Needless to say, this bell tower, like so many others in Valpolicella, such as those of San Giorgio, San Martino and San Vito of Negrar, recalls the style of the bell tower of the basilica of San Zeno in Verona.