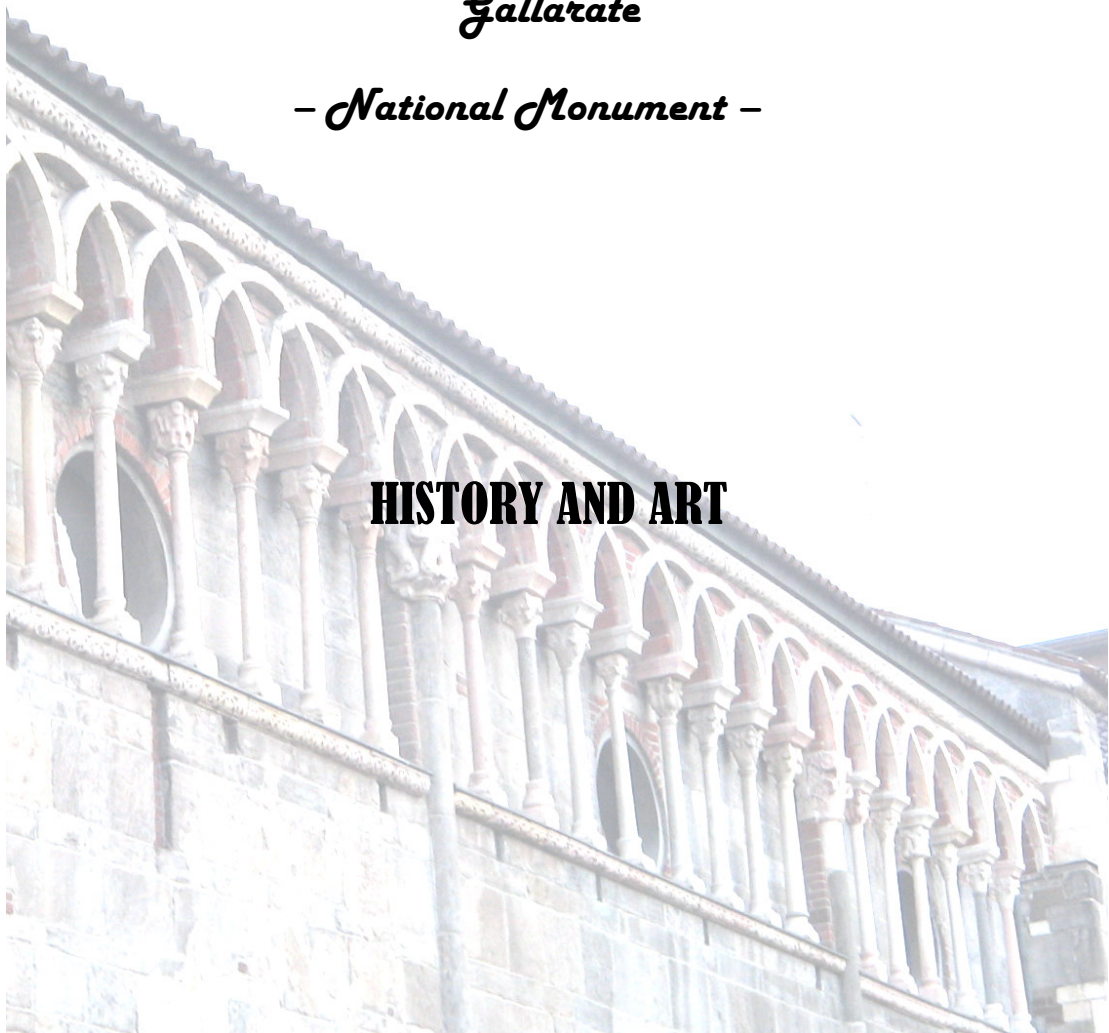


# *St. Peter's Church*

*Gallarate*

*– National Monument –*

**HISTORY AND ART**



Particularly numerous are the suppositions of the origins of the present day St Peter's Church, a National monument since 1864, and surely the best known historic building in the town of Gallarate.

By comparing particular architectonic elements and decorative features present in the Temple, its construction can be considered to be around the eleventh century and particularly interesting is research dating the construction of the Church back to the times of the Maestri Comacini.

The Church has managed to keep its original architectonic structure, typical of the Romanesque style with later Gothic characteristics, even if over the centuries, it has been subject to multiple interventions and transformations.

The first historic document dates back to 1364 and it refers to a bequest from the Lomeno family, the same family as which, a few years later, would receive the patronage of the Church, and would take part in a profound transformation as well as the artistic decline of the Temple in such a way that it would seem to have been converted into a small fortress. In the following years, the building will undergo further changes in its functions and become a meeting place for the community, a carpentry shop, a butcher's shop and so on.

In 1570, with the injunction of St Carlo Borromeo, orders were given to restore the building to its original function, that is to a place of faith, an order which will be carried out by the Lomeno family only in 1626 thus giving the Temple a Baroque line, alongside that which remained of the Romanesque elements.

At the beginning of the 1900's, extensive restoration works were carried out both to bring the Church back to its original architectonic state and to renovate the inside decoration under the artist Ernesto Rusca.

In 1911, a new consecration was carried out by Cardinal Ferrari. After the excavations made for archaeological reasons in the 1960's, promoted by the Società Gallaratese degli Studi Patri, the latest restoration works date back to the 1980's following the project of the Architect Francesco Moglia.

### ***The exterior***

The gable façade is of two levels, characterized in the middle by a fake loggia with interlacing arches resting on the shelves, the flight of which is interrupted by two small rhomboidal windows with polychromatic panes representing the symbols of the town.

The single portal on the right as seen by the viewer, is surmounted by a mosaic lunette of the 1920's with the representation of St Peter and St Paul, executed by Angelo Gianusi and the Scuola dello Spilimbergo of Venice. At the top of the façade, in the centre, there is a big circular window with a polychromatic pane representing Christ in the act of consigning the keys to St Peter.

To note, on the right hand pillar of the façade, there is a stocky figure with female aspects carved in the bare stone.

The side wall facing south, made up of three parts, is also characterized in its upper reaches by a loggia of interlacing arches resting on the little columns. The first span as seen in old photos of the Church, was already visible before the restoration works at the beginning of the 1900's, whilst the other two were hidden by 17th century buildings.

Along the loggia, there are three big circular windows and decorative arrangements can be seen at all heights along the walls.

To complete the prospectus, a more modest entrance to the Church is to be found along the second span. Like the southern side, the northern side is in three parts but without openings or entrances, even if made up of robust pillars. The prospectus is completed with a metal structure at the rafters carried out to house the ancient bells that were once part of the bell tower demolished during the restoration works at the beginning of the 1900's. The apse, completely restored, is subdivided into four parts, three of which characterized by slots. The same decorative arch motif continues along the south prospectus except for two little pillars, one of which, presumably more antique, has a more stocky form, whilst the other is characterised by its spiral shape.

### ***Entrance and Side Walls***

The inside with its single rectangular nave, is characterized by wooden trusses and a brick flooring, substitute of the previous Venetian one. The choir and its wooden entry door date back to 1910 whilst the Bernasconi organ is of 1888 and was overhauled in 1910 by the organ maker Elia Gandini of Varese. On the opposite side, to the right of the viewer, just above the rhomboidal window, there is a small shrine which was probably used for keeping the Eucharist when Holy Mass was still celebrated here after the Church had been transformed into a fortress around the XV century.

On the inside walls, a considerable amount of the frescoes, mainly those of Rusca and his school have been lost through humidity; those furnished by a drapery at the base were part of the old tapestries that adorned the Church in the past, whilst on the walls, in round frames, there are the representations of the 12 apostles. At the base of the curved arch of the Presbytery there are the figures of St Peter and St Hilary on the left of the altar, and of St Jerome and St Paul on the right. Overhead, however the wall is decorated with the symbols of the Evangelists and the hand of the Creator greeting life.

At the entrance, the stoup has been made out of a Corinthian capital of Roman origin, found during excavation works near the Parish priest's house in Arnate in Gallarate. On the left hand wall, about half way between the entrance and the presbytery, there is a painting showing the Virgin of Czestochowa which was given by the former Cardinal of Cracow, Monsignor Carlo Wojtyla to the pilgrims from Gallarate, led by Monsignor Lodovico Gianazza in 1974. The inside of the church is illuminated by two of the six original wrought iron lanterns donated by a Gallarate priest, Monsignor Simbardi, in 1939.

### ***Presbytery and Apse***

The Presbytery, placed three steps above the congregation area, is delimited by two magnificent Baroque banisters in polychromatic marble. The Baroque style altar also in polychromatic marble, is temple-like, surmounted by angels holding the symbols of the Passion and completed by two other angels in adoration at the sides.

Ever since 1911, the relics of Saints Onorato and Fortunato have been kept in the altar whilst some tombs found during the archaeological excavations of the 1960's have been immured under the church floor.

In the conch shell-like basin of the apse, in the upper part, there is an impressive imitation mosaic fresco showing "The Good Shepherd."

Set in the side walls of the altar, there are two portals with wood shutters which, in the past, were said to have given entry to the choir.

### ***The Crucifix***

In the past, the church was characterized also by an impressive crucifix placed above the area of the Presbytery which, according to legends and local tradition, was considered miraculous seeing that it was carried in procession by St Carlo Borromeo during his Pastoral visit in 1570.