



LEGENDA

1. Garibaldi Square
2. Church of the Villa
3. Pious Place of the Poor of Christ
4. Cardinal Branda Street
5. School of Singing and Grammar
6. Marquises of Magenta House
7. Church of the Collegiata
8. Museum of the Collegiata
9. Baptistery
10. Square of the Eternal Father
11. Monastery of the Humiliates
12. Palace of the Cardinal Branda Family
13. Palace of the Cardinal Branda Castiglioni / Municipal Museum
14. Palace of Castiglioni of Monteruzzo / [MAP]
15. Clerici House
16. Western Arch
17. Ancient walls
18. Seventeenth-century bridge
19. Ancient mills
20. Eastern Arch
21. Castle of Monteruzzo

THE HISTORIC JOURNEY - Palace of the Cardinal Branda Family

... The ancient village of Castiglione Olona is located in the small valley of the Olona River surrounded by the ruins of the old boundary wall of the village and warmed by the red colour of the Lombard bricks of its oldest buildings.

Walking through the streets near the centre you can't fail to reach, almost naturally, **Garibaldi Square**, at the intersection of the main streets of the village and centre of community life according to the humanistic principles pursued long ago by Cardinal Branda Castiglioni. The palaces of the most important institutions of those times stood at the corners of the triangular square: the House of the Lord, the Church and the Court. Only the Court has now lost its original function, while the others remain part of the community and may be visited.

The route begins from the church called "**Church of the Villa**" which is adorned on the facade by two large sandstone statues depicting Saint Antonio and Saint Cristoforo. The building, originally dedicated to the Saint Body of Christ and to the Four Doctors of the Western Church, presents a clear link with the Brunelleschi architectural style, probably thanks to a Tuscan master active in Castiglione Olona in those years, perhaps the Vecchiatta. Built between 1437 and 1444 it is characterized by a central plan main building, surmounted by an octagon whose sixteen columns with capitals support the hemispherical dome of the roof. The main portal, that leads inside the church, is decorated with refined vegetable motifs and busts of saints on the jamb, while the carved image of God the Father, flanked by two angels, stands out from the tympanum above. The interior is surprising thanks to the simplicity of its architectural proportions and the splendour of sculptures and paintings stored in it. Starting from the apse, you can admire the depiction of Christ who rises from the tomb (XV c). The altar below encloses an image carved of the Body of Christ in coloured stone. On both sides of the triumph arch, there are two statues of the Annunciation which rest upon capitals: the Virgin with the book and Archangel Gabriel, here carved without wings. On the opposite side, on the entrance and lateral walls of the entry, are four coloured statues made of baked clay, representing the Doctors of the Church. These statues guard the sarcophagus of Guido da Castiglione, made by the school of Teacher Amadeo, and the Lombard triptych of the Virgin of Grace between Saints Rocco and Sebastiano, attributed to Galdino da Varese, all relating to the fifteenth century.

residence takes place through an elegant round portal with the emblem of the **Marquises of Magenta** on the keystone. The family had lived there between the 1600s and 1800s, then the residence became property of the Castiglioni of Monteruzzo until 1930 when it came under the ownership of the church. On the opposite side of the road, below the gateway that once connected the two wings of the Magenta House, one sees a pretty tabernacle composed of a tempera table depicting the Madonna with Child and supplemented by a bezel decorated with the image of Saint Caterina di Alessandria between two Saints on a starry background. This is attributed to a painter who follows the style of Masolino.

Going on towards the end of the trail, one is attracted by the lively red brick of the ancient portal that once allowed access to the historic castle and now it is the entrance to the churchyard of the **Church of the Collegiata**. Approaching, you notice immediately the structure of masonry typical of medieval buildings and the ancient guides on the sides for the chains that once operated the drawbridge. The steep climb,



Palace of the Cardinal Branda Castiglioni

on a pathway of stones from the river, ends in the parvis decorated with white and red stones arranged in shapes of crosses and flowers. The church, strongly desired by Cardinal Branda Castiglioni, was built between 1422 and 1425 by the architects Alberto, Giovanni and Pietro Solari. Constructed exclusively with bricks made in Lombardy and with elements in sandstone, it looks like a building in late Gothic style with a longitudinal plan divided into three naves. The facade has the typical form of "hut" tripartite by buttresses and is framed by characteristic trefoil arches in

Branda Family characterised by its sandstone portal, whose arch, supported by two columns with Corinthian capitals, is carved with symbolic images referring to the history of the ancient family. After the pleasant walk you come back to Garibaldi Square where, crossing the wooden door, you can visit the **Municipal Museum**, once the historic residence of Cardinal Branda Castiglioni, an essential stop to appreciate fully the cultural impact of such an important historical figure. Just in this building there are the most significant examples of Cardinal Branda Castiglioni humanistic thought interpreted by the painting and sculptural skills of Masolino and Vecchiatta, who could experiment the perspective plans recently learned in Florence with Leon Battista Alberti's teachings. The descendants of the Cardinal contributed to enrich this heritage, ordering family portraits and collecting valuable items.

Inside the small courtyard entrance you are touched from the magic atmosphere of the fifteenth century. On the front wall you are immediately attracted by a particular ogival sandstone window, decorated with small fired bricks arches on the window-sill and by the sixteenth century coat of arms of the Storzas frescoed at the window side. The Renaissance loggia, closed by a glass wall, distinguishes itself by columns with Corinthian capitals style and by frescoes of the Siena school that overlook the square, inviting you to visit. The small eye of light terracotta, just below the picturesque balcony, opens itself at the chapel of St. Martino and suggests a glimpse of the precious cycle of the Vecchiatta.

Returning to the square and proceeding on the left, at the bottom of Cavour Street stands the **Palace of Castiglioni of Monteruzzo**, today home of the **[MAP] Museum of Plastics Art**. The access is through a massive wooden door and across the charming fourteenth century courtyard. The Palace housing the [MAP] is characterized by an elegant facade, built with Romanesque bricks, and by windows decorated with fifteenth century flowered terracotta tiles.

Frescoes of Lombard art, with hunting scenes and ornamental motifs with the family coats of arms, embellish the interiors of this historic building and are the setting for an extraordinary gallery of contemporary art, whose works were conceived inside a workshop known as the "Polymer Art." In fact a group of artists worked with Mazzucchelli Celluloid, the most important company in Italy for the production of plastic materials, on the initiative of Earl Lodovico Castiglioni, and produced works that have also been displayed in many famous museums around the world.

Leaving the church, you can notice a characteristic round sandstone arch to the left which is topped by the image of the "beneficial pious Nicola Castiglioni" (late XV c) carved in bas-relief while ripping his clothes with his hands to feed the children around him with his own blood.

The sacrifice refers to the ancient function of the place, which was designed for the inhabitants of the village enrolled in the "list of the poor" and the pilgrims passing through it. The place is known as **Pious Place of the Poor of Christ**. Built by the will of Cardinal Branda Castiglioni, in memory of his ancestor, it presents itself as a plain structure of U-shaped plan whose buildings are linked to one another by a remarkable renaissance porch.

Going on **Cardinal Branda Street**, at the beginning of the climb that leads to the Collegiata Complex, you will find the historic Town Hall, once headquarters of the **School of Singing and Grammar** (XV c). It is still recognizable by the bust of Cardinal Branda Castiglioni made of baked clay which lies near the entrance doorway between the frescoes of Aristotele and Cicerone, and by the fresco of the Madonna with Child between the two Saints. The school was founded in 1423 by the Cardinal and its aim was to provide the children with cultural and religious education.



Church of the Collegiata

Resuming the journey, your attention is drawn on the right by the historic home of the Magenta family, with a "U" plan oriented to the west that encloses a courtyard well protected by high walls. Access to the noble

brick in the upper part. The portal is decorated with twisted columns, made of stone, surmounted by a carved lunette and dated 1428, with images of the Virgin Mary with Child, Cardinal Branda Castiglioni, St. Ambrogio, St. Clemente, St. Lorenzo and St. Stefano. Under the lunette, carved within four niches, are the four evangelists depicted with the heads of evangelical symbols. Above the lunette there is a rose window in stone, while on the sides of the facade there are ogival windows with sills in sandstone. On the left, under the porch with rounded arcades surmounted by triangular peaks, you can overlook the enclosed courtyard of the New School Building that allows access through the graceful interior garden to the Collegiata Church, the Baptistery and the small **historical museum**. Of particular interest are frescoes of Masolino da Panicale, which decorate the vault of the apse of the church with a series of paintings dedicated to the life of the Virgin Mary, and the frescoes of Paolo Schiavo and Lorenzo di Pietro, known as the Vecchiatta, with episodes of the lives of the protectors Saint Lorenzo and Saint Stefano. At the end of the garden, where one of the towers of the ancient fortress once stood, is the **Baptistery**. Considered the jewel of Castiglione Olona, Masolino da Panicale, perhaps assisted by the Vecchiatta, painted a masterpiece: the stories of the life of Saint Giovanni Battista, from the Annunciation of paternity of Zaccaria to his burial. Heading back towards the old town along the roadway of riverstones halfway down, on the left, are some very old steps leading into Masolino da Panicale Street. The old steps, hidden by vegetation and protected by high walls, offer an ideal route for those that wish to enter into the most intimate reality of life in the small village and admire special artistic and architectural treasures.

At the far end of this deviation is Mazzini Street, and turning right takes you back in the direction of Garibaldi Square.

Along the way you meet, on the left, the **Square of the Eternal Father** identifiable by traces of a seventeenth-century fresco on the wall of an ancient noble palace painted in honour of Archbishop Carlo Borromeo, who visited Castiglione Olona in 1570, and by the emblem of the Archbishop Pietro Castiglioni carved in white marble on the side of the building.

On the right, you enter Nicolao Castiglioni Street known as Narrow Street of the Nuns because of the **Monastery of the Humiliates** that once stood there, evidenced, outside of the building, by a tabernacle depicting the Madonna with Child and by a small window surrounded by brick.

Near the square, on the right, stands the **Palace of the Cardinal**



Museum of Plastics Art

Some of these works were realised between 1969 and 1973 and are now preserved in the museum, a place where the continuous passage of time is clearly evident: the past gradually gives way to the modern contemporary art.

Outside the court, after leaving on the right the **historic residence of the Clerici family**, along Roma Street stands the **Western Arch**, connecting the ancient village to the Olona River valley, along the **ancient walls** that once protected Castiglione Olona. You then reach the **seventeenth-century bridge** from where you can see the Castle of Monteruzzo which stands out among the gentle hills with its elegance. Led by the opportunity to admire the landscape from that perspective, coming back on Roma Street along the historic location of the local Community Centre and through the **Eastern Arch** where, after some steps, you can see the castle, easily reachable by a short walk.

Crossing the long entry avenue, greeted by the century beech, maple and fir trees, you arrive close to the **Castle of Monteruzzo**, a suggestive building with its high towers and fired brick battlements that dominate the white profile. Built originally as an agricultural residence in the sixteenth century it owes its current look to interventions made between the 1700s and 1800s when the two towers were inserted, the north wing was lengthened and the typical medieval features (battlements and embrasures) were added, albeit without any real function.

Finally, in 2005, after a long and careful restoration work, Castle of Monteruzzo became headquarters of the civic library of Castiglione Olona, offering also a conference centre and space for exhibitions.