

FOCUS ON THE SAINT MAGLOIRE ABBEY OF LEHON



OVER
THE CENTURIES

VILLES
& PAYS
D'ART &
D'HISTOIRE

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OVER THE CENTURIES

1. Funded around 850, the abbey of Saint Magloire of Léhon was destroyed by the Vikings at the beginning of the X century. Photo © Public Library of Dinan.

For over a thousand years, Saint Magloire of Léhon was the architectural masterpiece of the Rance river valley.

A LEGENDARY FOUNDATION

We know the origin of the monastery thanks to several medieval manuscripts, all related to a primitive text written around 850, probably by of the monks of Léhon:

Six monks lived on the banks of the river Rance, far from the world temptations but in great need. They met Nomoïn, King of Brittany, who was hunting in the surroundings. He was so moved by their poverty that he promised to provide them with land, only if they provided the relics of a Saint. The monks went to the Anglo-Norman island of Sark to steal the bones of Saint Magloire, former bishop of Dol.

The King kept his word and allow them to erect the Saint Magloire Benedictine abbey of Léhon.

FROM THE FURY OF THE VIKINGS TO THE RETURN OF THE MONKS

After a few decades, plagued with the Vikings attacks, the Breton monks had to flee towards the east and take their treasuries with them. The relics of Saint Magloire arrived in Paris in 926 where, under the protection of Hugues le Grand (Hugues the Great) – father of the future King Hugues Capet – a new Saint Magloire abbey was funded.

It is a ruined abbey that the monks rediscovered when they came back a few decades later. The new priory erected was then submitted to the authority of Saint Magloire of Paris, as confirmed by the Pope Pascal II's bull in 1116.



1. The important works achieved in the XVII century are shown on the plans, like the one from 1634, and give information on the functions of the different rooms of the priory.

Plan ©national archives.

2. Totally in ruins from 1830, the priory church was heavily restored from 1885 to 1897.

Photo ©museum of Brittany.

The declining priory had a crisis in the reduction of monks seeking a vocation : 25 monks in 1653, 12 in 1722 and only 6 in 1767.

In order to gather the small religious communities of the kingdom, the King Louis XV ordered the closing of Saint Magloire of Léhon on May 24th, 1767. The last Benedictine monks left the priory and, until the French Revolution, a steward managed the place on behalf of Marmoutier abbey.

RESTORATIONS OF THE RUINS

Sold as a national asset in 1792, the priory had several owners before being partly fragmented. After being totally ruined around 1830, the church was restored between 1885 and 1897. For twelve years, Louis Chupin, mayor of Léhon and the abbot Fouaré Macé, priest of the parish, supervised the works and, in spite of some unfortunate decisions, saved the church. The rest of the monastic buildings were only restored in the second part of the XX century.

Only the medieval parts were listed as a historical monument in 1875, the rest being listed by a decree of September 30th, 1931. Saint Magloire of Léhon is now one of the most outstanding expression of Breton monasticism.



VISIT OF THE MONUMENT

1. Erected at the beginning of the XIII century, the Romanesque porch of the priory church has similarities with the porch of Saint Savior church of Dinan.

Redesigned several times throughout the centuries, the priory of Saint Magloire is now a composite set with medieval parts - the priory church and the monk's refectory - embedded in a monastic grouping typical of the Reformed Benedictine houses from the XVII century

Abandoned when the monks had to leave in 1767, the priory church fell in ruins before its main restoration between 1885 and 1897.

THE PRIORY CHURCH

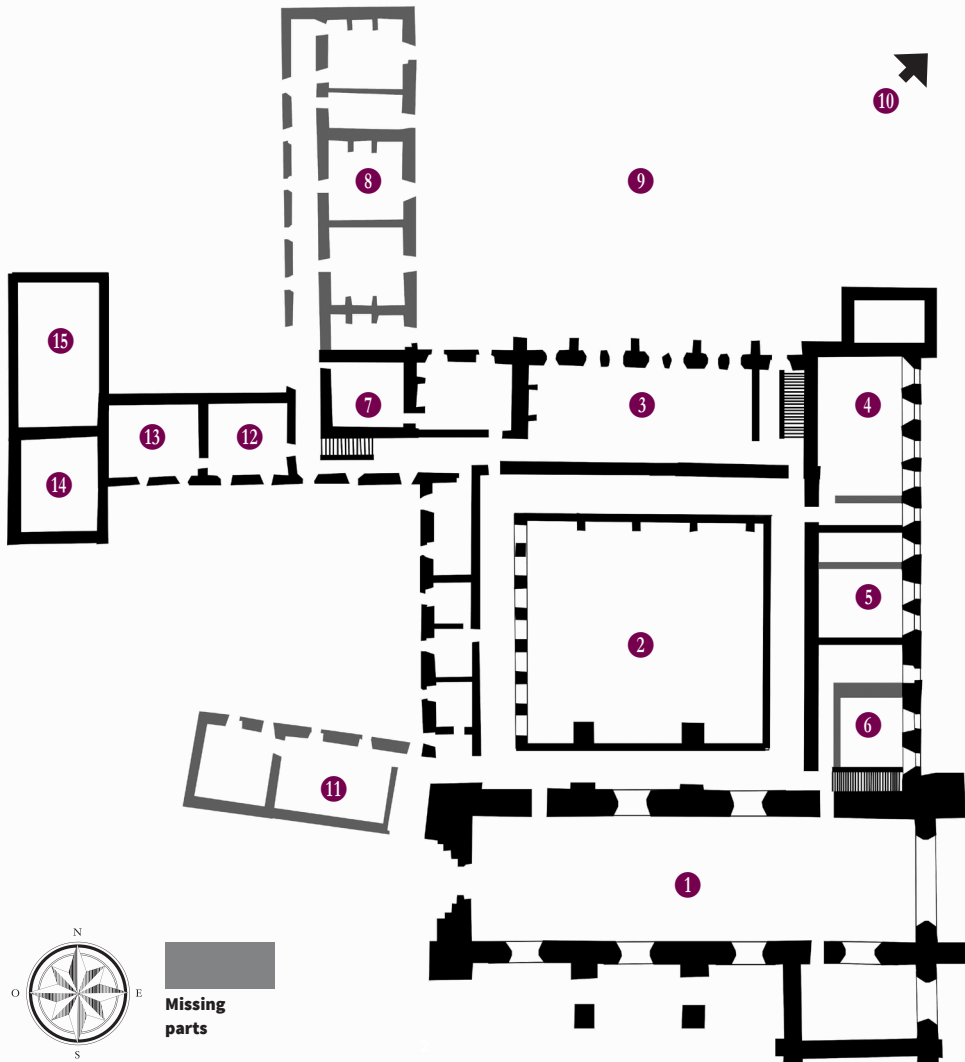
Built around 1200, the priory church **1** consists of a 124 feet long and 32 feet wide nave divided in three bays and completed with a flat chevet. The main stained glass was installed at the end of the XV century. The ribbed vaults, rebuilt late in the XIX century, follow the lines of the original ones.

The well-maintained Romanesque porch shows several similarities with the main porch of Saint Savior church of Dinan. Even though the decorations of Dinan's church follow the Romanesque style, the plant motives which ornate the capitals of the pilliars of Saint Magloire of Léhon show the influence of the gothic from Anjou in Brittany from the start of the XIII century.



PLAN OF PRIORY

2. Saint Magloire of Léhon
according to the plans of
the XVII century.





1. As one of few remaining from the Middle Ages, the refectory is enhanced by the stained glass of the master glazier Gérard Lardeur.

2. This four-level aisle accommodated the dormitories of the community.

3. The XVII century staircase was called the « matines staircase » and allowed a direct communication from the dormitories to the chuch.

THE CLOISTER

The cloister **2** was totally rebuilt in the XVII century under Jean d'Estrade, abbot of Saint Mélaïne of Rennes and commendatory prior of Léhon from 1671. The current sobriety of the decoration stands out against the primitive medieval cloister, some sculpted capitals of which are preserved. It consists of four galleries which arches are supported by simple pillars, originally protected by a framework covered by slates.

The different monastic buildings revolve around the cloister, according to the traditional organization of Benedictine monasteries.

THE NORTH AISLE

The monk's refectory in the north aisle **3**, is one of the most outstanding remains of the mediaval priory. The large glass windows of this large room, created by the master glazier Gérard Lardeur, open onto the gardens and provide a gentle and subtle light. The unity of the arches is interrupted by a remarkable pulpipt with a staircase and gallery. According to the rule of Saint Benedict, the monks had to eat in silence and listen to the Holy Scriptures. Some high and narro windows are facing the cloister. At the end of the room, a kitchen originally communicated with the refectory.



THE EAST AISLE

Originally, this aisle was divided into two, on either side of a secondary entry leading to the priory attics. On the left-hand side, a vast cellar **4** which disappeared in the XVII century - now a museum - was in direct communication with the refectory. The medieval levels can be seen through a small opening on the floor. On the right-hand side, the Chapter room **5** and the sacristy **6** led to the priory church.

The monk's dormitories were on the first and second levels of this aisle. Since the major works of the XVII century, they are now served by two staircases. The first wooden one communicated with the refectory and the second stone one led to the priory church. It is called the « matines staircase », used early in the morning by the monks to attend the services. This aisle has an outstanding level of attic, with remarkable frameworks.



1. The hostelry, where visitors were welcome, was an important building in the Benedictine monasteries.

THE HOSTELRY

As a transition space located in and out of the cloister, the current hostelry ⑦ was built in the XVII century. Some old plans show that many old buildings have been destroyed, such as the prior house and a space known as « the Beaumanoir's room ». It proves that the Beaumanoir landlords has been granted, as founders, some privileges.

As it is the case in most Benedictines monasteries, pilgrims, travellers or important visitors were welcomed in the hostelry. They could not get into the cloister and disturb the monastic life. Constructed at right angle to the hostelry, the infirmary ⑧ was in a building destroyed in the XIX century.





2. The gardens, now only for leisure, had an economical importance. Old plans shown orchards and mills.

3. Built at the end of the XVIII century, the « vide-bouteilles » (empty bottles) is one of the unusual charms of the Rance river.

THE GARDENS

Far from being a place for leisure, the gardens **9** had important economical functions. The plans of the XVII century show the existence of a dovecote, an orchard, and a watermill, supplied by a small reach of the Rance river.

The small leisure lodge on the side of the river **10** is from the end of the XVIII century. Joseph Bullourde, the new owner of the priory in 1792, built it to take advantage of the gardens. These small and numerous follies on the edge of the river are called « vide-bouteille » (empty bottles), in reference to a particular leisure activity.

OUTBUILDINGS

Located in the southern part of the priory, the outbuildings revolved around two yards. Some have disappeared, like the wine press **11** – others still exist but, sold off in the XIX century, they are now private houses : the bakery **12**, the servant's dwellings **13** the stables **14** and the miller's house **15**.



« IL Y A TROIS PRIEURÉZ POUR LE PREMIER EST LE PRIEURÉ CONVENTUEL DE LÉON, ORDRE DE SAINT BENOIST, DÉPENDANT DE L'ABBAYE DE NARMOUTIEN, ORDRE DE SAINT BENOIST, VAUT TANT AU PRIEUR QUI EST LE SIEUR DE GENLIS QU'AUX MOYNES QUI NE SON REFORMEZ, DOUZE MIL LIVRES »

JARNOUX Ph., POURCHASSE P., AUBERT G., 2016, *La Bretagne de Louis XIV, Mémoires de Colbert de Croissy (1665) et de Béchameil de Nointel (1698)*, PUR, p. 70.

Nearby :

The Castle of Léhon

Le bourg - Léhon

The Castle of Dinan

Rue du Château
02 96 35 45 20
chateau@dinan.fr

The Clock Tower

Rue de l'Horloge
02 96 87 02 26

Dinan, City of Art and History

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- The promotion of the quality of urban and landscape architecture
- Informing local history and culture for the benefit of residents and visitors
- Organising heritage and cultural tourism

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