



FOCUS

SAINT-SULPICE

DE FOUGÈRES

CHURCH



BRITTANY

**VILLES
& PAYS
D'ART &
D'HISTOIRE**

THE HISTORY

The origins of Saint-Sulpice church, built near the castle, date back to the middle of the 11th century. Independent of the fortress and its Saint-Marie chapel, it becomes the first parish for the inhabitants of Fougères. The church is placed under the patronage and protection of Saint-Sulpice.



In the Middle Ages, because of its strategic position on the border between Brittany and France, the city is an important military and merchant city. The population increases over time and the church becomes too small for the number of parishioners. Enlargements are therefore carried out in the 13th century, at the location of the current nave.

Gradually, collaterals are built. This succession of works, undertaken in the 14th and 15th centuries, allows for a noticeable enlargement of the building.

The choir, started in the 16th, is only completed in the middle of the 18th century. The choice of a prestigious rococo style decor gives the church a new aesthetic dimension.



1 - Saint-Sulpice view of the castle

2 - Keystone

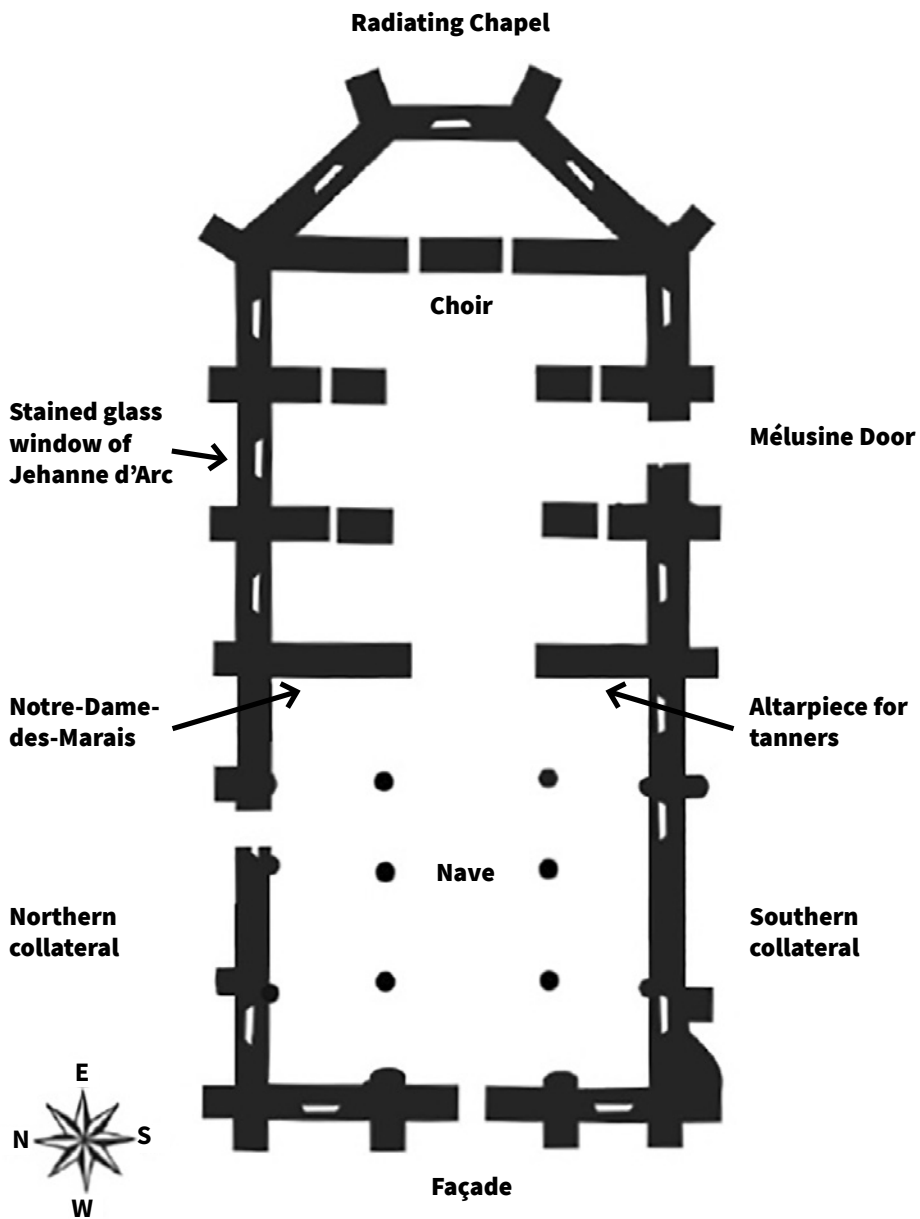
The stained glass windows, created at the end of the 19th and early 20th century, are the work of great master glass-makers from Paris and Laval. All these stained glass windows culminate in giving the building its current form and its unique character, both heterogeneous and harmonious.

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THE ARCHITECTURE AND THE EXTERNAL DECOR

Saint-Sulpice church is built in granite stone from the Fougères Region. The choice of this noble material has allowed for the creation of many sculptures for both external decor and interior design.

The building is located at the heart of the Étienne de Fougères enclosure that originally defined the cemetery. It was removed in the 19th century, for salubrity reasons. Today, the Calvary remains, the only witness of the traditional elements of parish enclosures.

Saint-Sulpice is the very example of a church known for "gables". This model, widespread on the border zone of the Marches of Brittany, is characterized by the absence of transept and a succession of chapels forming the collaterals. Large bay windows let the light penetrate to the nave that does not have direct lighting.

This provision has favoured the creation of impressive stained glass, especially in the 16th century. At that time, Pierre Symon, a master glass-maker from Fougères created large sets in several churches in the Fougères and Vitré Regions. Only a few elements of these Renaissance stained glass windows remain today in Saint-Sulpice.

The outside of the church boasts an extraordinary decor carved in the stone: monstrous animals, foliage, heads of men, hybrid characters ... The rows of gargoyles, mouths open and spitting water on rainy days, are particularly impressive.



1 - Church in the enclosure
2 - Decorated gable



THE NORTHERN COLLATERAL

Facing the castle, the north side of the church is characterized by a major break in style. The oldest part of the building is punctuated by triangular gables and buttresses surmounted by pinnacles. The choir, completed in the 18th century and covered with a huge roof, breaks brutally with the jagged effect from the Gothic structure.

This northern façade of the church is the most decorated. The terrifying gutter serving gargoyles also have symbolic religious functions, such as repelling evil.

Originally, statues of protector saints, now disappeared, were placed in the niches dug out in the buttresses.

In addition to the monstrous gargoyles, a whole decor of strange characters and small odd animals bring this façade to life and recall the sometimes facetious character of the sculptors of the Middle Ages.



1 - General view of
Saint-Sulpice church
2 - Gargoyle



1 - Façade with the bell tower

2 - The Abbot Poussinière flying away in the air ...

THE NORTHERN FAÇADE

Curiously, the main façade of the church, where the large front door is located, is the least visible and the least decorated. The orientation and the situation of the building prevented the creation of a real forecourt and the façade seems to have been created without seeking harmony. The southern gable, adjoins the polygonal tower surmounted by the bell tower. Its very acute spire, is surrounded by four small spires.

The bell tower, long leaning for lack of good construction, gave birth to a curious legend. In the 17th century, Abbot Poussinière, accused of witchcraft, would have flown in the air with a bourgeois. Being terrified by this surprising situation, he would have hung on to the bell tower and ... would have made it lean!

THE SOUTHERN COLLATERAL

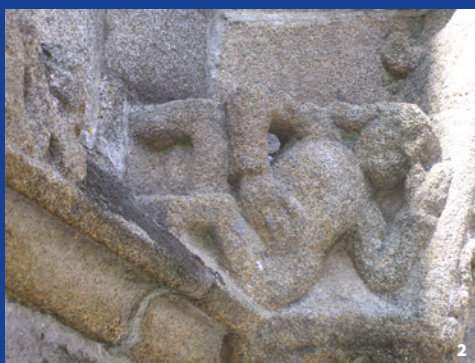
Of the same structure as the northern façade, it is differentiated by a less abundant decor. However, the door giving access to the choir is surmounted by an arc in accolade boasting a rich plant decor. Above this entrance, a bas-relief presents a woman brushing her hair in front of her mirror. This is a classic representation of sinful pride. According to the local tradition, the Mélusine fairy would appear, a mythical ancestor of the Lusignan family. Highly eroded, this sculpture could date earlier than the 15th century door.

THE RADIATING CHAPEL, TO THE EAST

Completed in the 18th century, the church choir does not have gables and its radiating chapel is cut-off. The whole thing is surmounted by an imposing roof from where a small campanile emerges.

The sacristy, located at the back of the choir and illuminated more simply than the entire building, does not have illustrated stained glass windows.

Around the choir, small sculptures, such as "gluttony", symbolize the seven deadly sins.



1 - Mélusine Door

2 - Bas relief: gluttony

THE ARCHITECTURE AND THE EXTERNAL DECOR

At first glance, the interior of Saint-Sulpice church is impressive overall, both by its architectural decor and furniture and by the richness of its stained glass. If the building appears harmonious in its form, it is nevertheless heterogeneous in its design.

The sides, formed of disparate chapels, frame the vaulted wooden nave. This ensemble of Gothic style adjoins a prestigious rococo style choir.

THE NAVE

The nave is made up of four bays of unequal widths and the pillars supporting Gothic arches are not facing each other. The irregular overall is contradicted by the remarkable wooden vault, called "in hull". This inverted boat hull shape is made in panelling and gives the Gothic nave both a warm and majestic effect.

The preaching pulpit, surmounted by an angel playing the trumpet, date from the 1730s. This is the work of the sculptor Chesnel from Fougères.



1 - Nave with vault in hull
2 - Nave and preaching pulpit



THE NORTHERN COLLATERAL

This collateral is made up of four chapels with irregular dimensions, arched in ribbed vaults. Some keystones, sculpted with shields, identify donors who had funded the construction.

An amazing four-poster building houses the baptismal font. Created in 1770, it is the work of the Sculptor Thomas Thory from Laval who also created the altarpiece for the choir.

The immense painting representing "the descent from the cross", a copy of work by Rubens, is a creation by Noël Le boussel, painter and sculptor from Fougères dating from the 17th century.

The Notre-Dame chapel has an impressive 14th century granite altarpiece, formerly decorated with painted scenes. In the centre, the donor's emblem: François II, Duke of Brittany and Father of Duchess Anne. Two angels wear an escutcheon of black ermines on a white background, surmounted by the ducal crown.

This altarpiece now houses the statue of Notre-Dame-des-Marais, whose tradition brings back the origins of the primitive castle. After being thrown into the swamps, during the English attack of 1166, the statue was miraculously found a century and a half later! Every year, since 1923, a great pardon honors this Virgin, very venerated in the Region of Fougères.

Two other statues adorn this altarpiece: a Pieta and an angel playing the viol.



- 1 - Baptismal fonts
- 2 - Altarpiece of the Dukes of Brittany
- 3 - Statue of Notre-Dame-des-Marais

THE CHOIR

Built without transept, Saint-Sulpice church does not present the traditional cross plan. Access to the choir is thus done without transition space. This peculiarity accentuates the contrast between the Gothic part and the choir built in the middle of the 18th century in a rococo style, inspired by Baroque.

The richness of the decorations and its balanced composition make the choir of Saint-Sulpice an impressive set. The search for harmony, desired by rector Vallée, allowed several artists to put their art at the service of a new design of the liturgy, more spectacular and more sensitive, wished for by Counter-Reformation. Paintings and statues constitute a decor with teaching value by image and express a deep devotion to the Virgin Mary.

The altarpiece, decor located behind the altar, was carried out in 1757 by the Sculptor Thomas Thory from Laval. In the heart of white woodwork, enhanced by gold leaves, are two statues, Saint-Sulpice and Notre-Dame-de Grâce. In the centre, the painting representing "the Assumption of the Virgin" comes from a Parisian workshop. At the bottom, as for "the sacrifice of the Son of Abraham" it adorns the predella.

The whole altarpiece is surmounted by two angels and a probably older Christ on the cross.



1



1 - View of the overall choir

2 - Altarpiece and high altar

- 1 - Worshipping angel
- 2 - The adoration of the Magi

The altar table, in red and black marble from Mayenne, is executed by Jean Rousseau, marble worker from Laval, between 1757 and 1760.

The monumental cylindrical gilded wood tabernacle is composed of six sculpted panels representing scenes from the life of the Virgin and Christ. It is decorated with rococo made garlands of leaves and flowers.

Surrounded by two worshipping angels, this set is the work of Thomas Thory who also creates the two lateral altars. These now accommodate the statues of Saint Anne and Saint Joachim, parents of the Virgin Mary.

Between 1764 and 1774, Antonin Viollard sculpts eight statues for the church choir. The four evangelists, Saint Pierre and Saint Paul, are placed on the consoles carved for this purpose.

In 1793, according to the wishes of the artist, these statues are rechristened by the name of hero of Antiquity, in order to save them from revolutionary destruction!

Originating from a Parisian workshops, four paintings, the Assumption, the Nativity, the Adoration of the Magi and the Resurrection of Christ, fit into the panelling made by La Fontaine.





1 - The altarpiece for tanners
2 - Virgin with child



THE SOUTHERN COLLATERAL

Like the northern collateral, it is made up of four vaulted chapels with crossed ribs.

In the first bay, lies the old chapel of the Brotherhood of Tanners, dating from the beginning of the 15th century. It houses an imposing granite altarpiece whose upper part recalls the Passion of Christ. The Cross of Jesus, those of the two thieves and the instruments of Passion, carved in the stone, have teaching value.

This altarpiece, originally decorated with painted scenes, now houses Our Lady of the Rosary, a polychrome stone statue from a workshop from Vexin in Normandy.

The shrine containing the relics of Saint Viviane, martyr of the catacombs of Rome, was offered to the parish by Pope Pius IX in 1850.



1

The southern collateral also houses several paintings: "The glory of a Saint" attributed to the Italian painter G. B. Salvi and "The donation of the rosary" created by G. Jolivet in 1726.

1 - The mission of the Apostles

"The mission of the Apostles" represents ten apostles from around the world, framed by Saint Philippe and Saint Jacques le Mineur, patron saints of tanners. This painting, in the form of accolade, was formerly placed on the altarpiece of tanners.



1 - Discovery of Notre-
Dame-des-Marais

THE STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

If only five fragments of the 16th century recall the original glass, Saint-Sulpice church nevertheless has an exceptional set of stained glass, created between 1885 and 1926. Very representative of the art of stained glass painting, these works were created by the Parisian workshops Lavergne, Tournel and Payan-Guyonnet as well as by Alleaume, the master glass-makers from Laval.

Two glass-makers of the choir offer a specific interest. The stained glass of "The discovery of the statue of Notre-Dame-des-Marais" refers to local history. That of "Jehanne d'Arc", patriotic stained glass, surprises with an anachronistic detail: the presence of three infantrymen. These are the Ganzin brothers, returned safe and sound from the Great War. Their family celebrated this return by dedicating them a place on stained glass.



“SAINT-SULPICE CHURCH (...) IS A BUILDING WITH OVERLY DECORATED WALLS, VERY METICULOUS, FROM THE END OF THE FLAMBOYANT AND TORMENTED GOTHIC STYLE SHOWING BIZARRE AND FEROUS GARGOYLES ...”

Albert Robida "Old France"

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