

The Saint Jean-Baptiste Church of Les Alleux

Foreword

The village of Les Alleux is located in the north corridor of the Argonne hills. The origin of the name of the village comes from the Chart of constitution established by the Countess of Grandpré in 1507. It was confirmed few years later by the Archbishop of Reims to Les Alleux inhabitants whose names are mentioned in the chart.

Each inhabitant was required to pay taxes in kind and as such was given an "ALLEU". The original owners could not leave the community, an isolated village in the forest.

Soon the men exploited the forest, in particular to produce charcoal for heating and wood for house construction.

The church is under the patronage of Saint John the Baptist, and is not classified as a historical monument because built late nineteenth century. The present church replaces an old church dating back 400 years with no recognized architectural feature and probably deteriorated during the 1870 Napoleon III war which led to the disaster of Sedan.

The beautiful current building originates from the end of the nineteenth century in which we discover inscriptions engraved on the marble plate at the entrance of the church at the bottom of the bell tower and recalling the memory of the participants to the church construction:

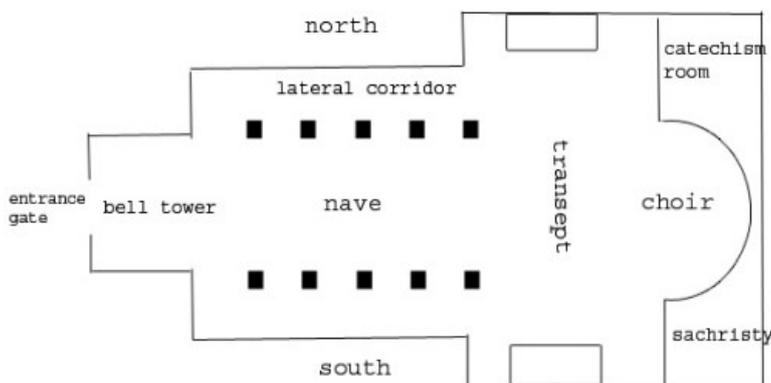
- Mr Jules Marmottin Architect,
- L'Abbé Housseau, Priest of the Parish,
- Mr Hérard Mayor of the municipality,
- Mrs de Granrut and her Children, Donor, in memory of Mr de Bigault de Granrut, Owner of "Domaine de Maison Rouge".
- Benoît Marie Langénieux Cardinal Archbishop of Reims who blessed the new church.

Members of the Granrut family were contractors. They had developed with the necessary logistics, in the territory of the Argonne, the Manufacture of flasks and molded glass objects. This industrial activity allowed them to make successful business, particularly following the launch of quality glass bottles for the production of Champagne wine.

Jules Marmottin Architect contributed to the construction of several churches and public buildings, in Ste Menehould his native region, and in the area of Coulommiers where he had the positions of State architect and in Les Alleux.

The cemetery, which today extends south of the church, was located in the past north of a former church built around 1600 and partly demolished before the construction of the present church.

1 - Construction of the church



manufactured by the SAND Company in Feignère, north France

The general contractor was Leger Noblet of Neuville Day village, for the masonry, the laying of bricks and chipped stones.

Origin of materials was mainly:

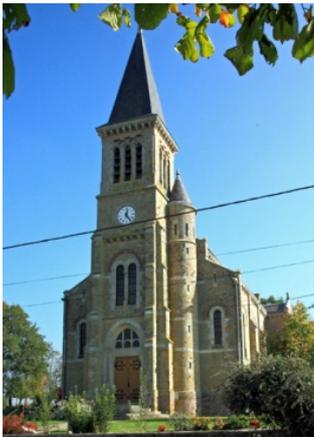
- The bases on which the pillars rest are made of Lérouville rock.
- The columns set against the pillars are in Givet blue stone having the consistency of the worked marble.
- The cut stones come from the quarries of Savonnière in the region of the Meuse.
- The marble columns come from Fumay.
- The floor tiles of the church were

- The carvings of the chests were realized by Xavier Mathieu de Reims, who had great experience of the monuments.
- The foundations are made of hydraulic lime concrete and of from the gravels of Meuse river.
- The veil of the walls of the Nave consists of jointed yellow hollow bricks, manufactured in Rethel.

The architect Jules Marmottin had studied during the construction, the possibility to install a false ceiling in the Nave, with exposed oak joists covered with planks of wood resting on the raven chipped stones at the top of the pillars. But this design wasn't retained.

A safety study of works including the risks of lead poisoning, of handling and supporting, was concluded before the construction of the church, for reasons of morality and entrepreneurial ethics regards to workers and quality.

2 - Exterior of the Church



The sober massive bell tower overhanging the church is made of construction bricks and cut stones, and a cross, a vane and a rooster are mounted at the summit. The bell tower was recently repaired and slightly modified after a thunderbolt.

The roof of the church is very elegant. Its oak beams support a blanket of Ardennes slates carved in Fumay and are designed like the roof of the City Hall of Paris.

The tall and wide windows of the apse of the Choir and the side chaps generate important luminosity to the interior of the church.

Exterior and transverse walls interfacing arches of church are of pale pinkish-light exposed bricks. They are symmetrically constructed, north and south perpendicular to the bell tower and to both chapels of the Transept crossing the Choir.

The very slim apse facade is fairly modern styled and is the most beautiful view of the church architecture.

South of the main facade of the bell tower integrates an imposing round tower in which the stairway to the bells is to be found.

The south and north side façades are strict. They are built of brick and carved stones highlighting the stained glass windows and the upper part of the walls supporting the roof. External facades and portal of the entry church with its cut stone coverage are sober.

From outside the stained glass windows are dark and protected by metal grilles in order to avoid breaks.

Neither sculptures nor statues are located outside the edifice.

The gargoyles ensure overflow of roof waters, hollow cut stone alignments are placed on the walls of façade bearing the gutters. Protection lead sheets constituting the evacuation route of the rain waters mark out the periphery of the church at the roof edge. Typical cast iron waterways decorated with their connecting rings evacuate rain waters as well.

On each side of the Choir are located two small rooms with windows protected by interlaced irons sealed to the stones surrounding them. These rooms are isolated from the Transept and the Choir of the church by large oak doors.

The external access doors to both rooms are allocated one to the sacristy where the priest prepares the office, the other one to teaching of catechism and socio-educational concepts for children.

Southerly to the church is located a cemetery where traces of former village inhabitants can be found.

Northerly, is situated an old military cemetery where cut stones of the church built around 1600 are lined and flowered. Apart tables for games and social sharing were recently installed to the attention of young and old people.

Plantation of an orchard of local species fruit trees is anticipated at village inhabitants' disposal.

3 - Interior of the church

A - The porch of entrance under the bell tower

The main entrance of the church is built under the bell tower.

The church main access is through a large solid oak gate supported by wrought ironwork. A marble plate is placed at the upper part of the entrance that traces the memories of the church construction.



North side, having crossed the door, there is a religious cross supported by a pedestal coming from an old chapel built around year 1600 in Marcelot. This quarter part of Les Alleux was at that time the most important one.

South side the oak stair door to the bell tower is accessible. On the opposite a cut stone window is located whose purpose is to ensure the symmetry of the entrance.

The entrance ceiling is a vault bearing the organ gallery level, the holes for the passage of the ropes formerly used to ring the bells manually, as well as the circular hatch allowing installation and removal of the bells.

The bells are positioned in the wood structure of the bell tower and are accessible by a stone staircase, ending on a wood ladder.

The three current bells were installed in May 1923, replacing those removed by the German army during the Great War (WW1) for the melting of guns and weapons.

Subscribed by Parishioners, the bells were put again in function in 1923 and repaired in 2018. On these are engraved their bell name, the names of the godfather and the godmother and the circumstances of the donation (“my sister stolen by the Germans on March 19th, 1917”)

- Big bell : (Pauline Jacqueline) -Latreille Paulin Mayor- Mrs. De Tassigny d'Angleront.
- Medium bell : (Eugénie Isabelle) - Hérard Louis Councilor- Madame De Bigault de Granrut Charnacé.
- Little bell : (Louise Évangeline) - Louis Brisfert AC14 / 18 ex lieutenant - Mrs Evangeline Latreille.

A tribune for access to the organ located under the bell tower and above the entrance dominates internally the Nave and the Choir, makes possible for village young people mastering the music to play harmonium during the services, this providing a pleasant musical tone to the Parishioners.

B - The main Nave



The vaulted Nave in the central part shaped warhead is four spans.

The keystones remain sober in their design and ensure the solidity of the building.

The pillars are lined by a column of marble from Fumay city located in the north Ardennes, they support the vault and are surmounted by a foot vaulted and decorated by a classic pattern that gives relief.

Doubleaux arches of the vault are sober and belted with red colored bricks giving a visual.

North of the Nave is a wooden preaching chair adorned with motifs on which are carved characters that should be identified to explain the retained concept. Access to the chair is by a staircase revolving around a pillar.

Nave floor covered with decorated cement tiles from the entry consists of a central corridor. Solid oak wood benches placed along the Nave floor since the creation of the church. Rows of benches have fixed places with name plates of Parishioners having bought or rented them in the past.

In the Nave, near the Transept, back to the pillars are two white plaster molded statues: northerly it represents Saint Eloi with a miter, an anvil at his feet, a golden cross with the book of the trades at its hands (vocation and recognition are to the trades of carpentry of forge, goldsmiths and work of the Earth), southerly it represents “Sainte Thérèse”, veiled and holding a cross with a bouquet of roses.

Close to the bell tower, on the side and leaned against the north wall is fixed a molded plaster white statue representing the Holy Virgin wearing a rosary.

Next to the Choir, at the southern wall, is a white molded plaster statue depicting Saint Anthony of Padou holding in his arms a child placed on a book, rosary and cross are associated.

End of the southern Nave, an engraved mural dated 1739 coming from the old demolished church of the village depicts the beheading of Saint John the Baptist.

C - The side aisles corridors



North and south side aisles corridors are limited by the outer walls and pillars bearing the vault of the Nave.

Lateral corridors lead from the entrance of the church to the side aisles Transept chapels, sacristy and catechism room doors.

The walls of the side aisles corridors gather suspended stands showing “the Way of the Cross”. They are small boards, painted and framed carpentry finely carved, representing the XV stations.

At the north corridor, near the bell tower, are located the confessional and a presently not used wall seat accommodated in the wall. At the south corridor, near the bell tower, is positioned the baptismal font, church aged, with a bronze cover opened by a cross and hiding two basins.

Baptismal funds and confessional might be north south inverted, according to the worship practices in the churches.

Southern corridor near the bell tower on the external wall is fixed a marble plate in memory people of Les Alleux died for the survival of the country during the World War 1.

Northern corridor near the bell tower is hung on outer wall a white molded statue of the Virgin Mary, veiled, with a rosary around the arm. This statue replaced the painted sculpture representing the Grotto of Lourdes.

Non-authentic chimney climbs in the south lateral corridor seems to be foreseen for heating.

The side aisles corridors are currently used for cultural exhibitions.

D - The Transept



The Transept with its chapels is the North-South transition between the Nave and the Choir.

In the Transept, are located two chapels with a classical altar (tabernacles blocked between two symmetrical lateral supports for the installation of candlesticks) decorated with golden painting plaster statues polychrome gilt colored.

Northerly a statue shows the Virgin and Child wearing a crown, the child standing on a globe on a pedestal surrounded by a snake.

Southerly a statue, whose decorations have been deteriorated over time, represents Saint Joseph holding in one arm a child who supports a globe, and the other arm a carpentry tool.

At Choir edge, in the Transept, aligned with the lateral corridors, small stained glass windows are decorated with geometric motifs.

In the Transept, at half height are visible double carved stone windows concealed by bricks to the under roof small rooms of sacristy and catechism.

Aligned with the lateral corridors, both sides of the Choir in the Transept are built decorated alcoves surmounted by flowery motifs of carved and molded stone, with integrated polychrome molded statues:

Northerly representing Sainte Geneviève accompanied by a sheep, with its cruciferous medal, and it’s missing stick.

Southerly representing Saint Roch with a bag of pilgrim, his raised finger, with sheep at his feet and cross at his hand.

In the northern Transept chapel stands on the ground, in poor conditions, molded and painted statue representing Sainte. Genevieve.

Wooden stalls with folding seats are installed in the Transept symmetrically to the Choir

The grid separating the Transept of the Nave has been dismantled to bring closer the Parishioners.

E - The Choir



The master altar centrally located in the Choir of the church dedicated to Saint John Baptist is of classic style. On the altar is installed a tabernacle framed by candelabra brackets.

The altar stone was deposited, its location capped with cement, and is now located in the alcove to the right of the altar where is located the tray heater and its evacuation pool (towards the center of the earth).

Mid height, are visible the double stone carved windows out of bricks giving in the under roof small contiguous rooms.

The floor of the Choir consists of tiled and carved stones used as steps.

Banners, half height attached to the walls frame the Choir. They were used for processions at the Chapel of St. Genevieve in Marcelot.

Bottom of the Choir half height are installed two white color molded statues representing the Christ with the cross, and Mary with a rose in her hand.

In the Choir, on the floor, flanking the altar, are installed three molded and polychrome statues representing Sainte Germaine or Sainte Genevieve (clarification analysis is being performed) carrying spindle and cattail. One of them with its medallion crucifer opens his apron on a bouquet of rose and is accompanied by a sheep at her feet. These three statues originally adorned the chapel of Marcelot.

F - The stained glass



The French Ministry of Culture has described and inventoried the church stained glass windows of Les Alleux, which are not formally protected. The inventory report with the commented photos is available on the internet.

The church stained glass windows of Les Alleux installed in the years following the construction, although dusty and with infiltrations deserve at least to be visited.

Stained glass windows are installed in the wall windows surrounded by carved stone which give on the outside.

The stained glass windows are assemblies of painted colored transparent glasses, (grisaille and sanguine on glass).

All the stained glass windows are visible from the central part of the church, in the Nave, the Transept and the Choir, looking in the upper part towards the walls.

The master of work of the stained glasses Mr. Hutin of Reims had all the exemplary skills supported by a great experience.

All the windows, signed and unsigned were probably made by Roger Desjardin d'Angers successor of F. Haussaire between 1926 and 1931.

Are identified six glass roofs with characters: Coronation of the Virgin, Takeoff of Saint John the Baptist, Sainte Genevieve, Saint Eloi, Saint Louis, Sainte Claire.

The visitors will find stained glass windows representing:

- The takeoff of Saint Jean Baptiste directed by Roger Desjardins of Angers in 1926.
- The stained glass doubles of Saint Germain d'Auxerre blessing St. Genevieve.
- Saint Eloi carrying the hammer, the anvil behind him with his bishop's crook.
- Saint Claire, in memory of Mrs. Eugène de Bigault de Granrut 1838-1908.
- The coronation of the virgin IN PERPETUUM CORONATA TRIUPHAE, gift of Mrs. Lacroix Hérard de Vouziers, 1931 manufactured by Roger Desjardins in Angers.
- Saint Louis supporting a cushion with crown with a cane in memory of Mr and Mrs Herard Bourguignon.

The other windows, not worked, are constituted by colorful geometric patterns whose symbolism is to be clarified.

The composition of colors stained glass is in harmony with Christian symbolism, warm colors dominate south facing windows to reflect life. On the opposite, the cold colors are to the north-facing windows, as if to recall the existence of the evil and the precariousness of earthly life.

Church past life

The reservation of seats on the benches of the church was managed by "La Fabrique" using a still accessible register, available in town hall. This document was created in 1860 and was held until 1905, reference date for the separation of the Church and the State in France. In the past the organization "La Fabrique" has managed seats with a system of places recording and identification. In the register named "Fabrique" we see the names of people and families who rented or bought places. In particular, Men / Women sides were distinguished. A receipt guaranteeing the good management was given to the Parishioners.



We all have a strong memory of "L'Abbé Marchand" Priest around 1950 and Father of oratories celebrating the Virgin located at the entrances of villages of Le Chesne area, as the one built in Les Alleux. In addition he led organization of cultural bus tours for visits of civil and religious buildings and locations for children from surrounding villages.

We remember as well the procession that took place every year, starting from the Les Alleux church to the chapel of Marcelot, at the day of the village festival.
