



Projet Erasmus+ Namur - Marsala

" Patrimonia "



A la découverte du patrimoine historique, architectural et culturel

Villers-la-Ville Abbey's ruins



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ABSTRACT

General presentation

The abbey of Villers-la-Ville is a Cistercian abbey. The monks belonged to the order of the Cistercians. It's a monastic order of pontifical right (the pope). This order is a reformed branch of the benedictines whose origins go back to the founding of the abbey of Citeaux by Robert de Molesme in 1098.

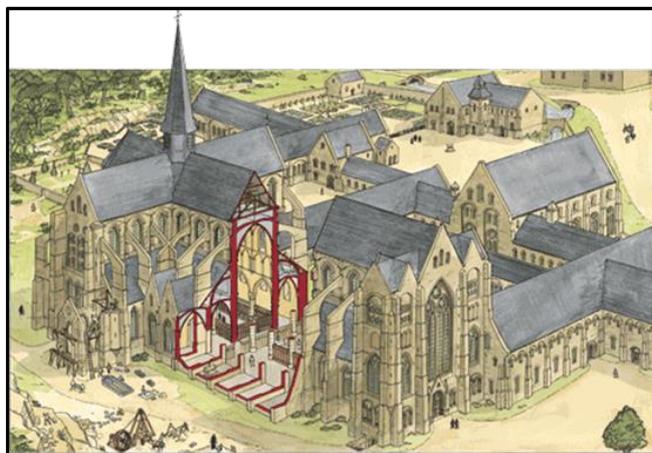
The site is listed in the exceptional heritage of Wallonia since 2013.

The ruins of the abbey testify to the evolution of architectural styles through the ages. We can distinguish the presence of different styles.

The *Roman style* (from 1146 to 1197) recognizable by its footings, the regional stones, semi-circular arches and this feeling of austerity.

The *Gothic style* (since 1197) recognizable with its rose, broken arches, ogive vaults, its gargoyles and the feeling of greatness.

The *Neoclassical style* (since 1784) presents in some buildings features with slotted walls, balustrades, columns and this feeling of cleanliness and renewal.



Summarized chronology of the different evolution phases of the site.

- ⇒ 1146 : creation of the abbey, Roman Style
- ⇒ 1197 : change of style ; Gothic
- ⇒ 1715 -> 1784 : construction of new buildings ; Neoclassicism
- ⇒ 1796 : destruction of the abbey because of the French revolution
- ⇒ 1893 -> 1914 : makeover of the abbey
- ⇒ 2010 : construction work
- ⇒ 2014 : maintenance work
- ⇒ 2012 : creation of a new garden « The garden of the Simples ».
- ⇒ 2015 : inauguration of the « Garden of the Abbot » and the « Garden of the monks »
- ⇒ 2018 : inauguration of the « Garden of scents » and its meditation space.
- ⇒ 2018 : creation of an hop
- ⇒ 2018 : creation of the « Rose Timeline »
- ⇒ 2019 : transformation of the «Infirmery Garden» and « Pharmacy Garden

Vidéo of general presentation

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/134855415>



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History of the site

In 1146, Chevalier Gauthier de Marbais and his mother Judith invite monks from the abbey of Clairvaux (France) to erect a new abbey in Villers on their lands. A little group of 17 monks settle in Villers.

Some time later, Saint Bernard visits the new community and encourages it. Thanks to the Lord of Marbais and his mother, the monks get building materials - stone quarry, forest and river – in order to build a Romanesque abbey.

A new construction began in 1197. A new abbey built in Gothic style will take 100 years to be finished. At this time of great wealth, the 400 or so monks in the community own almost 10,000 hectares of land up to Antwerp.

From 1508, date of the 1st invasion, until the end of the 17th century, the monks must leave the premises 9 times for insecurity reasons.

The 18th century is the second golden age of the Abbey.

The medieval buildings are refurbished in neo-classical style. The abbey palace and its gardens are erected.

The French Revolution drive the monks off. The Abbey is ransacked, looted in 1794 and sold to a materials dealer who dismantles it stone by stone. The vegetation and the rain do the rest ... The Abbey falls into ruins.

The still majestic ruins attract the romantics throughout the 19th century and even now! Victor Hugo, visiting 3 times Villers, draws the ruins of the hotel / brasserie.

The Ottignies-Charleroi line put into service in 1855 brings the first tourists to the Abbey. As citizens are not yet sufficiently aware of the heritage, the line will cross the gardens of the Abbot's palace.

The Belgian state, owner of the place since 1892, begins a large restoration and consolidation project. Under the direction of architect Charles Licot in 1893, the nave of the church is cleared and the ashlar are sorted.

The restoration works are interrupted during the two world wars. It was not until 1984 that a new consolidation project began again.

In 1972, the ruins are classified as a site and historical monument. With its 650 years of occupation, the ruins bear witness to the evolution of architectural styles.

In 1992, the Abbey is classified exceptional heritage of Wallonia.

Site upgrading and reunification work began in 2010. The completion of the works will see the inauguration of a new visit, a scenography area and a timeline.

Inaugurated in 2012, the "Garden of the Simple" contains one hundred medicinal plants. This garden of medieval inspiration is utilitarian, symbolic and meditative at the same time. It invites to resourcing.

After extensive maintenance work, closed spaces for years have been accessible to visitors since summer 2014. The prison, the monumental staircase of Montaigu, the cellars of the Abbot's Palace, are places to rediscover.

Inaugurated in 2015, the "Jardin de l'Abbé" and the "Jardin des Moines" include more than 250 species of medicinal, dyeing, aromatic and culinary plants. These gardens dedicated to the well-being of the body and the spirit complete the "Jardin des Simples".

A 5th garden, the "Garden of Scents" coupled with a second meditation space is inaugurated in May 2018. It begins at the foot of the named place leprosarium and climbs to the Saint-Bernard Chapel. The eight panels of the Meditative Path that line the course are an invitation to stop in order to be reconnected with ones body, emotions and environment.

A hop is located west of the former brewery of the abbey. It is in this area that, according to a testimony of 1867, was the ancient hop of the monks. The aim of this modern hopping is a didactic one. It presents the different hop species available today for the production of beer.

Ancient roses species are placed opposite to the timeline that reminds the history of the Abbey.

In 2019, a "Pharmacy Garden" is created on the site of the former "Jardin des Infirmes". It is dedicated to plants used to fight cancer and culinary and aphrodisiac plants.

Today, after the religious, the poors and the pilgrims, the Abbey is still attracting more than 160,000 visitors a year looking for a change of scenery, relaxation or spirituality.



