



Berry / Limousin

29 May to 4 June 2004

The Guide Michelin describes Troyes as “une cité d’art” which is rich in churches, public buildings and medieval timber-framed houses. Lying in a loop of the River Seine, the old town is girded with a belt of spacious boulevards which, appropriately enough for the region, give the town plan the appearance of a gigantic Champagne cork.

The city of Troyes is built on the site of a fortification of the Gauls. **La cite des Tricasses** – the origin of the name of Troyes – was converted to Christianity in the 3rd century. In 451 Attila the Hun pillaged the area. Reims was burnt and the invaders turned towards Troyes. According to legend, Saint Loup, the bishop of Troyes, went to Attila and offered himself as a hostage in order to save the town. The legend claims that Attila was so impressed by the holy character of Saint Loup, that he agreed to spare the town.

In the 10th century Troyes passed into the hands of the Comtes des Champagne. This was a period that considerably enriched the town. One of the counts, Henri I, built 13 churches, 13 hospitals (including l’Hôtel-Dieu de Troyes) and benefited the town in many other ways. For this he acquired the title “Henri Libéral”.



les maisons à colombages

The sites that we shall be visiting on the walk are:



Cathédrale St-Pierre-et-St-Paul

Les maisons à colombages - Troyes is justly famous for its half-timbered houses such as la *Maison du Boulanger* and la *Tourelle de l’Orfèvre*. The buildings along la *Ruelle des Chats* form, according to the Guide Michelin, “une vision médiévale”.

Cathédrale St-Pierre-et-St-Paul - building started in 1208, but the building now shows three main periods of Gothic style: by mid-13th century the building had reached as far as the transept. The choir was then closed by a temporary wall while Pope Urban IV decided on the construction of a basilica (*Basilique-St-Urbain*) on the site of his birthplace. In the 14th century the transepts and nave aisles up to the fourth bay were built, then work stopped with the Hundred Years War. Construction resumed in the 15th c and the nave vault and the magnificent clerestory window date from this period. The Rose window over the Great Portal was completed in 1554.

Basilique-St-Urbain - This church is the reason that building stopped on the Cathedral in the 13th century. It was built between 1262 and 1286 and shows great delicacy in its tracery. The Guide Michelin describes it as a perfect example of Champagne Gothic in the 13th

century and Christopher Wilson describes it as Gothic “played with almost to breaking point ... every member is so finely down that we become anxious for its stability”.

Église Ste-Madeleine - This is the oldest surviving church in Troyes. Constructed at the end of the 12th century, it received a new apse between 1498 and 1501 and was much modified in the 16th century. The Gothic nave was reconstructed in the second half of the 19th century.



Bourges is located on the northern edge of the Massif Central, at almost the exact center of France. It is at the confluence of the Canal du Berry and the Auron and Yèvre rivers. The town is located on the site of an ancient Celtic capital whose chieftain, Vercingetorix, was defeated by Julius Caesar in 52 BC. It is claimed that the Romans massacred its 40,000 inhabitants during the conquest. The town then became the important Roman settlement of Avaricum [town of abundant water], with a river port, consisting of a harbour and wharves. Avaricum also had a vast Roman amphitheatre. The town flourished until the coming of Saint Ursin who brought Christianity with him in the 3rd century. It became an archiepiscopal see. In 1101 the town became French. Charlemagne unified Berry, which was named after the Bituriges Celts of the region, and Bourges became the capital of the duchy of Berry by the 14th century. From 1360 to 1416, Duke Jean de Berry spent a fortune on commissioning works of art for the town.

During the Hundred Years' War (1337 and 1453), when other parts of France were in English hands, Bourges was the capital of Charles VII of France. Charles published the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges in 1438, which limited papal authority over the French church. In 1463, Louis XI founded the University of Bourges. The university's influence spread beyond Berry, attracting such notables as John Calvin who later published his ideas on the reform of the Church. He received considerable support in Bourges, and the rest of Berry. During the French Revolution, the university was abolished. In 1487, over two-thirds of the town was destroyed by fire and Berry's influence and wealth declined. From the 17th century Bourges declined further, while other towns on the River Loire expanded economically.



Bourges: the Old Town

In 1427, Jacques Coeur, who had previously amassed a personal fortune, became Charles VII's chief financier. In 1443, Coeur commissioned the building of the palace in Bourges, which is considered to be one of France's greatest secular Gothic structures. However, in 1451 he fell from favour and was arrested. He escaped from prison, but died on the Greek island of Chios in 1456.

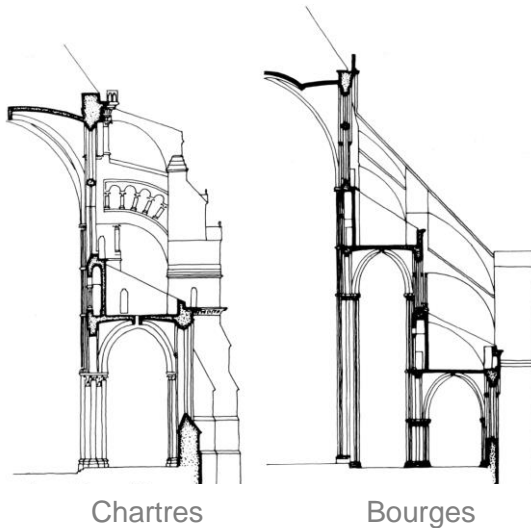
Cathédrale St-Etienne – the cathedral of Bourges is seen as one of the most outstanding examples of early French Gothic.

The original 4th century church was replaced in the 11th century by a new church started by Archbishop Gauzlin. The existing church was a new and grandiose scheme initiated by Henri de Sully, who was Archbishop of Bourges from 1183 to 1199.



The new work was begun in the mid 1190's, making Bourges a contemporary of Chartres Cathedral, and it is interesting to contrast the two buildings. At Chartres, the aisles of the nave, choir and transepts are much lower and dominated by the height of the main vessel. The quadripartite vault emphasises the division into bays, causing the eye to halt in its progression along the line of the church. At Bourges, however, there are two aisles – the inner aisle being fully three-fifths the height of the main vessels, the outer aisles being lower giving a staggered arraignment. Moreover, the vaults are sexpartite, so that the bays are not so heavily stressed. The sense of unity of the interior space is further emphasised because of the absence of transepts. The nave and the four aisles are entered from the west by a magnificent arrangement of five portals, which are richly decorated with sculpture

Despite damage over the course of time, Bourges possesses an important collection of stained glass. In particular, the five apsidal chapels contain medallion windows, most of which date from 1215 to 1225.



Part section through nave and aisle(s)

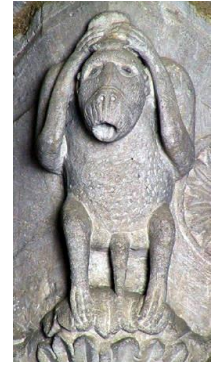


Neuve-St-Sépulchre - the church consists of two separate structures: one rectangular, one round. The earlier, rectangular church was founded 1034 –1049 and was dedicated to St James the Great. A group of pilgrims decided to build a replica of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem on the site. They were aided and advised in their scheme by Eude de Déols – a former pilgrim to the Holy Land. It is said that the new church was intended to completely replace the original structure, but then reports from the Holy Land



told of the addition of a rectangular structure to the original rotunda! In order to preserve the resemblance to the original, it was decided to retain the rectangular building.

The main attraction is the rotunda – 22m in diameter and decorated with delightfully carved capitals. The upper part of the rotunda was restored by Viollet-le-Duc in the 19th century.



La **Charité-sur-Loire** - The Priory Church of Notre-Dame was a daughter house of Cluny and was built in the second half of the 11th century. After Cluny, the Priory Church of La Charité-sur-Loire was the largest in France. It was 122 m long and 37 m wide and could hold 5000 people. It gained the title of “The Eldest Daughter of Cluny”.

The church was built c. 1059 – 1107 and the chevet (c. 1060) was closely based on Cluny II. In c. 1125 a rebuilding plan was started with the intention of transforming the church into a modified version of Cluny III, with a monumental façade with two towers and richly sculptured portals. The older chevet, which was of the parallel apses, or apse echelon type, was replaced by an ambulatory with five chapels. The nave was lengthened and a large ante church with a great façade was started.



If completed, the façade would have had two great western towers, each with a spire and each with two sculptured portals, flanking the great central portal. However, the project was never fully completed and a fire in 1559 separated the church from its western façade. The church today consists of the first four bays of the nave (unfeelingly restored in 1695), transept and chancel.



Cathédrale Saint Cyr et Sainte Julitte, Nevers – a vast basilica which incorporates all the architectural styles from the 10th to the 16th centuries. Its plan is of the twin apse type – more common in the Rhineland area with churches like Speyer, Worms and Mainz, than in France.



Internally, the most impressive aspect of this building is its sheer size. The Romanesque apse is dedicated to Ste-Julitte and contains a very indistinct 12th century fresco of Christ surrounded by the symbols of the Evangelists.

Église St-Étienne, Nevers - the site became Cluniac in 1068. After the monastic buildings were renovated, a new church was started in 1083. The church is recorded as being complete at the time of its dedication on 15 December 1097.



St-Étienne displays a mature Romanesque style with a beautifully articulate plan, based on the “Pilgrimage Type” churches. The superstructure of the church was built of fine ashlar, instead of ashlar over a rubble core, and so the size of interior supports could be reduced and the nave carried to a considerable height, with a semicircular vault over the clerestory. Elegant arcaded screens strengthen the transept near the crossing tower.

Only the base of the central tower remains as this, and the two towers on the western façade, were destroyed during the French Revolution.



Abbaye de Plaimpied – In 1080 Richard II, Archbishop of Bourges was responsible for the introduction of a group of Augustinian canons regular to Berry. The church of St-Martin was started towards the end of the 11th century, but lack of finances meant that the work dragged on through the whole of the 12th century.

The church is particularly important for its fine set of sculpted capitals which include a superb “Temptation of Christ” (see right).



Drevant Roman Archaeological Site - this is one of the most important Roman sites in this area of France. The site was excavated in the 19th century and revealed a large complex of buildings, dating from the 1st to the 4th centuries A.D., including a bath complex (no longer visible) and a theatre.



The theatre, which is c. 285m. in diameter and rises to a height of 16m, could seat 1,500 people.



Château d'Ainay-le-Vieil - a moated medieval château with an outer curtain wall and towers dating to 12th to 14th centuries. The picturesque appearance of the château has gained it the name of "the Carcassonne of Berry".

In 1467 the château passed into the hands of the Bigny family and in the 16th century Gilbert de Chevenon, Marquis de Bigny, added a new hall in the Renaissance style. The château is still owned and lived in by descendants of the Bigny family.



Abbaye de Noirlac - a Cistercian abbey founded in the 1130's when Robert of Clairveaux (the cousin of St Bernard of Clairveaux) settled with a community at La Maison-Dieu-sur-Cher in an area that belonged to the monks of La Celle and which, later, acquired the name of Noirlac (Black Lake). Unusually for the Cistercians, the site chosen was not isolated, but lay near important route ways.



The abbey was initially very poor, so much so that Bernard applied to Abbot Suger, the Councillor to King Louis VII.

Building of the church started c. 1150 and was completed by the beginning of the 13th century.

Église St-Aignan, Brinay - Despite the rather plain exterior, the chancel of this small church is decorated with an extremely fine set of 12th century murals. The church itself was probably constructed at some time during the 11th century, although the extreme simplicity of the architecture makes dating somewhat difficult.



The paintings fall into five groups: those on the soffit of the chancel arch and a group on each of the north, east, south and west walls of the chancel.



The labours of the month: June

The main components for each group are listed below.

- The soffit of the chancel arch:** the twelve labours of the months
- The north wall of the chancel:** the Annunciation; Nativity; the Angels appear to the Shepherds; the Magi
- The East wall of the chancel:** the Massacre of the Innocents; the Angel's Message to Joseph; The Flight into Egypt
- The south wall of the chancel:** the Fall of the Idols; the Baptism of Christ; the Temptation of Christ; the Marriage at Cana
- The west wall of the chancel:** two Saints (possibly two of the Apostles); a man with an arrow in his foot (of unknown significance); two figures (the figure on the left may be the prophet Jeremiah).



the Annunciation



detail from the Temptation



the Magi

Laon is splendidly situated on a 100 m (328 ft) rock outcrop overlooking the plain. The ancient town of **Laudunum** was the capital of France for a time during the Carolingian period (9th and 10th centuries). Laon's role as a capital ended when Hugh Capet took Laon by treachery, drove Charlemagne's descendants out of Laon and established himself in Paris. Under Hugh Capet the bishops of Laon became dukes and peers with the privilege of assisting the king during sacred rites at Reims. In the 13th century the town was strengthened with a new wall and ramparts.

From the Carolingian period on, Laon became a renowned religious and intellectual centre, and in the 11th century the "Laon School" flourished under Anselm and Raoul of Laon.

Cathédrale Notre-Dame - building started on the cathedral in the 12th century under Gautier de Mortagne, probably shortly before 1160, and was completed in about 1230. The west front is both lovely and unusual, with three deep porches decorated with statuary. The famous towers (56 m – 184 ft tall) are imposing, yet light in appearance and pierced with large bays. Huge statues of oxen stand on the corners, recalling the legend of the great ox which miraculously appeared to assist a team of oxen struggling to drag stone to the top of the hill for repairs to the cathedral.



Cathédrale Notre-Dame

Inside, the nave is roofed with sexpartite vaulting 24 m (78 ft) high, and has four stages: great arches, galleries, a blind triforium and a large clerestory. The chancel terminates in a flat east end. The south transept leads to a 13th century chapter house.

Chapelle des Templiers - Quite close to the cathedral is the 12th century Knights Templar Chapel. The round church recalls the shape of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. A porch and gallery were added in the 13th and 14th centuries. The chapel passed to the St John's Knights of Jerusalem when the order of the Knights Templar was suppressed in the 14th century.

Rempart du Midi et Porte d'Ardon - The 13th Ardon Gate stands at the end of the south ramparts. The gate is flanked by watchtowers with pepperpot roofs. The south ramparts end in a citadel built for Henri IV by Jean Errard. There are excellent views from the ramparts over the plateau of St Vincent.

Porte de Soissons - The Soissons Gate dates to the 13th century and is reinforced with round towers. A curtain wall links the gate to the great *Tour Penchée* (Leaning Tower).

