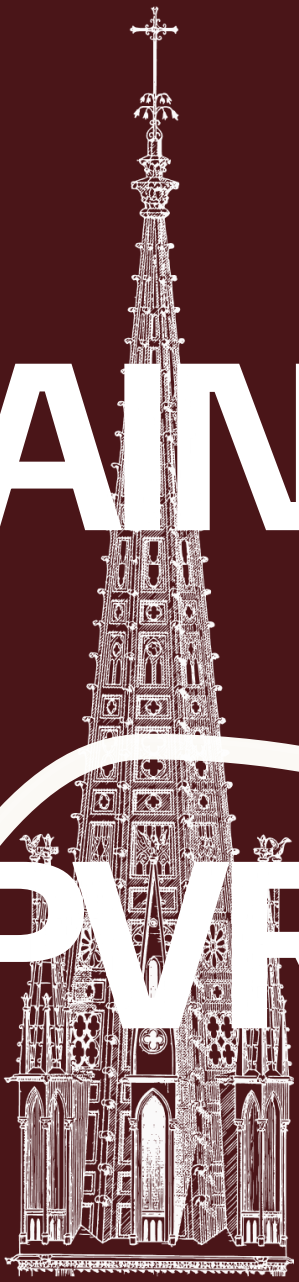
SAINT EPVRE



VISITOR'S NOTEBOOK

BASILIQUE · NANCY

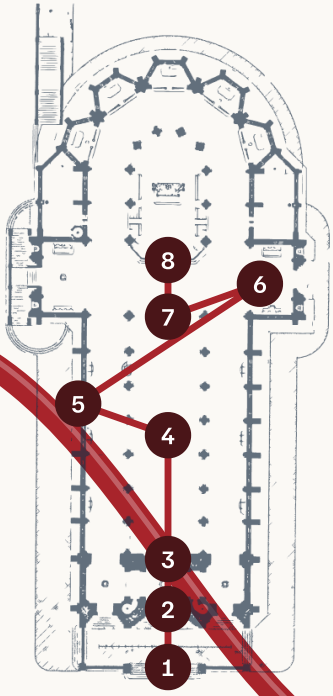
BEFORE YOU GO IN

Nancy, 1865: a priest inherits a building site with no money

Picture the Old Town under the Second Empire. The streets smell of freshly cut stone. On the square, a Gothic church has just been pulled down, and another is rising from the ground, far too big for the parish.

In January, old Father Simon dies, a few months after seeing the foundation stone laid. His successor is Joseph Trouillet. He is past fifty, known as a builder, and he has one fixed idea: to finish the finest church in Lorraine.

This notebook takes you in his footsteps, in eight stops, from the square to the choir.



01 The square

02 Inside the entrance

03 Under the gallery

04 The nave

05 The windows

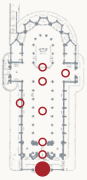
06 The transept

07 Facing the choir

08 Facing the altar

The basilica is first of all a place of prayer: during services, please stay at the back and keep silent. The choir and the crypt are not open to visitors. Points on the plan are approximate.

01



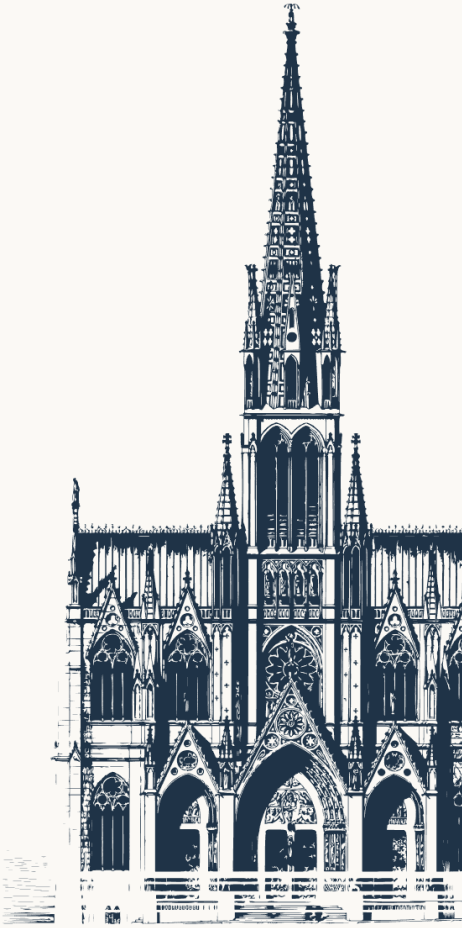
STOP 1 · THE SQUARE

To clear space for his basilica, Trouillet bought up the neighbourhood

Stop at the foot of the great stairs and look up. The spire rises 84 metres: the square tower turns octagonal, then the stone opens into lacework, studded with crockets, up to the cross. No steeple in Nancy goes higher.

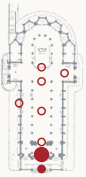
What you can no longer see are the houses that hemmed the church in. Trouillet bought them for nearly a million francs, then had them pulled down. The square you are standing on is his work.

Turn around: on the fountain by the architect Cuny, René II charges on horseback, the duke who defeated Charles the Bold beneath these walls in 1477. The statue is by a young man from Nancy, Mathias Schiff.



The façade, drawn by Prosper Morey, Prix de Rome

02



STOP 2 · INSIDE THE ENTRANCE

A church paid for by all of Europe

Go in, and let your eyes get used to the half-light. Before going further, look at the marble plaques at the back of the church.

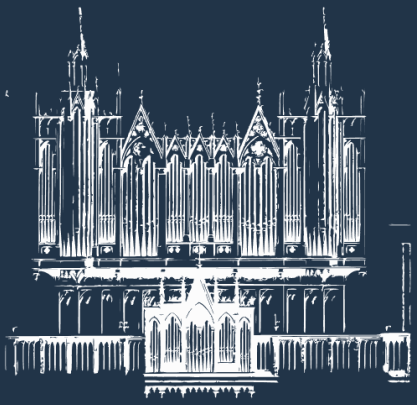
One lists thirteen countries: France, Austria, Italy, Germany, Belgium, and as far as Ireland and Hungary. Trouillet knocked on every door in Europe, and every one opened. In thanks, a Mass has been said for these benefactors every year since 1873.

Near the font, a pillar bears the list of the parish priests of Saint-Epvre since 1594. The last name carved there is his.

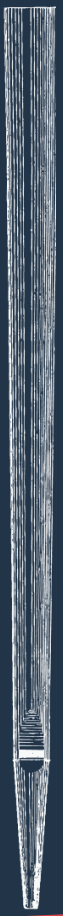


A carved door of the basilica

03







The case drawn by Morey · a front pipe

STOP 3 · UNDER THE GALLERY

An organ awarded a gold medal in Paris in 1867

Turn back towards the entrance and look up. The organ in the gallery was shown at the Paris World Exhibition of 1867, before the whole world, and came back with a gold medal.

Its Gothic case was drawn by the church's architect, Prosper Morey. The polished tin pipes at the front are only the visible part: behind them hide forty-four stops, three keyboards, a pedalboard, and a Barker machine that lightens the organist's touch.

If you are lucky enough to hear it, listen for the deepest note: it comes from a 32-foot stop.

04



STOP 4 · THE NAVE

A nave designed down to the last gas jet

Walk slowly up the nave. Nothing here was bought from a catalogue.

The pulpit was carved in oak by the Klem brothers of Colmar, to Morey's plans. Prophets keep watch beneath the tub, and angels with raised wings guard the sounding board.

Notice there are no chandeliers: they would have spoiled the perspective. Instead, each pillar carries a copper bracket by the Dehin brothers of Liège, with four or six gas jets. Picture the nave on a winter evening in 1880, all golden in their light.

Sublet's great paintings are not painted on the stone: they are canvases glued onto the wall.



The Klem brothers' pulpit · a Dehin wall lamp

05

STOP 5 · THE WINDOWS

2,300 m² of stained glass from the workshops of Vienna

Turn towards the windows. Between 1867 and 1877, Carl Geyling's workshops in Vienna sent more than 2,300 m² of stained glass to Nancy.

In each bay, bishops of Toul, saints of Lorraine and doctors of the Church stand beneath Gothic canopies. At the very bottom, look for the coats of arms of the families who gave the windows.

Seventy-four windows, five roses: at Saint-Epvre, wrote the author of the monograph, "the voids prevail over the solids".

> *"The effect of these richly enamelled windows is grand, striking and mysterious all at once."*
>
> René Hogard, 1931





A choir window, after the monograph

06



STOP 6 · THE TRANSEPT

Saint Michael slaying the dragon, a canvas by Sublet

The priest who built the church lies in the transept

You are now at the crossing. Look up: four pillars, ten metres apart, carry a vault of more than 100 m^2 at 24 metres, and the whole weight of the tower.

In the west transept, Saint Michael slays the dragon inside a quatrefoil, one of Sublet's canvases.

In the right transept lies Mgr Joseph Trouillet, who died in March 1887, between Saint Epvre and Saint Peter Fourier. Twenty-two years of fundraising, building and debt end here, at the heart of the church he willed into being.

07



STOP 7 · FACING THE CHOIR

A choir made for great feast days

Stay at the crossing: the choir is not for visiting, it is for admiring.

On each side stand twenty oak stalls. Their backs are pierced to let the light of the windows through, and musician angels stand between the gables.

On great feast days, forty choirboys took their places here, in silks of every colour, ermine and embroidery. According to the monograph, others may do as well, but “nowhere do they do better”.

The high altar is by Théophile Klem. Its great candlesticks are 1.20 m tall, with three kneeling angels at the foot. The choir floor is laid with black African marble, found in the rubble of the Appian Way in Rome.

A stall · a candlestick of the high altar

08



STOP 8 · FACING THE ALTAR

The head of Saint Epvre, saved from the Revolution

Saint Epvre was bishop of Toul in the 6th century. In 1790, Father Parisot obtained the saint's head from the Benedictines of Toul. On 5 November, it crossed the Old Town in procession.

Then came the Revolution. Parishioners hid it in their homes, and gave it back only to the first priest after the Concordat. It now rests in an Italian reliquary, carried by winged griffins, at the heart of the high altar.

Beneath the choir, the crypt holds the two priests who built the church. A gate forged in Lunéville closes it, with spikes that make climbing "difficult for wrongdoers".

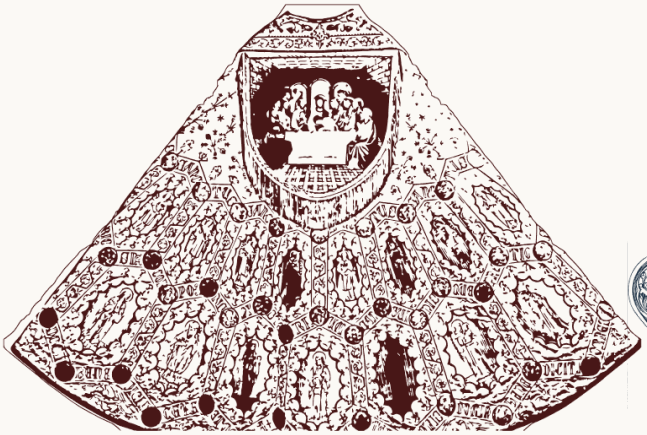


The crypt gate · a coat of arms from the old church

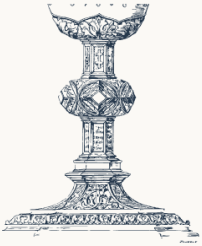
WHAT YOU CANNOT SEE

An empress, nuns in exile and a collector priest

These pieces are not on view, but they tell the basilica's story. One chasuble was embroidered by the hand of the Empress of Austria herself. The great white Last Supper cope is the work of nuns expelled from Aachen in 1871, whom Trouillet took in at Nancy.



The white Last Supper cope



A chalice



The ewer



The 1875 medal

3372 kg

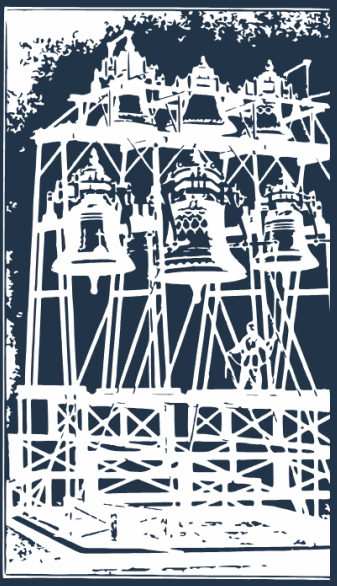
ON YOUR WAY OUT

Nine voices, one of them a bell from 1502

On your way out, listen. The oldest bell dates from 1502, and Morey himself moved it from the old tower to the new belfry.

The great bell, cast in May 1867 by Ignace Hilzer and given by Trouillet, weighs 3,372 kg. It was always rung on its own.

Thanks to the system of the Hungarian Joseph Pozdech, a crown cast with each bell lets it be turned twelve times, and a single man can set it swinging.



Pozdech's bell frame





PORTRAIT

Father Trouillet, builder and fundraiser

Born in Lixheim in 1809, ordained in 1833. As a young curate in Lunéville, he asked in 1838 for the parish of Chanteheux, which nobody wanted, so he could stay chaplain of the hospital too. He later founded the parish of Saint-Maur there.

He came to Saint-Epvre in 1865 and never left. Pius IX made his church a basilica in 1874; it was consecrated on 7 July 1875.

For his golden jubilee in 1883, eighteen prelates surrounded him, and gifts came from all over Europe. The parish's servants clubbed together to give him a missal. He died in 1887.

> *"The greatest builder of churches known in our day."*
>
> Mgr Besson, bishop of Nîmes



1080

IN BRIEF

Nine centuries on the square

About 1080
Duke Theoderic II founds the parish.

1436 – 1451
A Flamboyant Gothic church replaces the first.

29 May 1864
Mgr Lavigerie lays the foundation stone.

22 October 1867
Franz Joseph visits the site.

20 March 1871
The church is blessed.

26 November 1874
Pius IX makes it a basilica.

7 July 1875
Solemn consecration.

1999
Listed historic monument.

1875

VISITING SAINT-EPVRE

Place Saint-Epvre

54000 Nancy

In the heart of the Old Town, a short walk from the Ducal Palace and the Grande Rue.

Opening: Saturdays from 4.30 to 6.30 pm, and at Mass times. Free entry. Check the times on the website before you come.

Masses: on the website of the Oratory, which has run the parish since 1996.

Find out more: the full history, the virtual museum of paintings and the illustrated inventory are on the website (in French).





SAINT-EPVRE

BASILIQUESAINTEPVRE.COM

Texts and drawings after the Monograph of the Church of Saint-Epvre (1890). Engravings vectorised for this notebook.