

Saint Patern Parish Church of Séné

HISTORY AND GUIDED VISIT (**ENGLISH VERSION**)



HISTORY

The parish of Séné, under the patronage of Saint Patern, the first attested bishop of Vannes (around 465-511), was built in the Middle Ages (XIVth century), probably as a subsidiary church of the parish of Vannes, Saint Patern, outside the walls. In 1451, the parish of Séné was attached to the episcopal Chapter of Vannes, and remained as such until the French Revolution. The current church, constructed between 1878 and 1894, consecrated on 25.09.1887, replaced an old Roman church, in the shape of a Latin cross, with a square tower and multiple additions, as shown by the municipality's cadastral surveys (1804). In light of the ravages of time, panalling, vault, structure

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threatening to collapse, a decision was taken in 1874 to build a new church, on the site of the cemetery surrounding the previous one. The older church was demolished in 1878, and all that remains are some wall sidings and a doorway arch in front of the current presbytery.

Located nearby Séné Cove, on the Gulf of Morbihan, the current church, the work of architect Édouard Deperthes (1833-1898) – known for building the Basilica of Sainte Anne d'Auray and the reconstruction of the Hôtel de Ville in Paris – appears as an emblem of the neo-Gothic style, mixed with traces of the Roman style, and is characterised by :

- **the regularity and rigour of the lay-out** : nave with 3 spans ; choir with 3 sections ;
- **the austerity of the interior elevations** : granite columns, semi-circular vaults and arches ;
- **the brightness of spaces** : the choice of stained-glass windows sifts a diffuse light, thrown back by the whiteness of the vaults ;
- **the passivity of minimalist decor** : no paintings, but 16 well-arranged statues.

The execution does not correspond fully with the wishes of Édouard Deperthes, who planned a granite spire of nearly 53 metres – in order to complete the « ring of spires lining the Gulf of Morbihan » – as financial constraints led to the current tower, closer to a belfry than a bell tower, limited to 28 metres. It is flanked by 2 small polygonal towers containing stairs for accessing the bell tower, which has 3 bells (1803 for the small and medium-sized, cast by François Chapel of Vannes ; 1960 for the large bell, cast by Bollée of Orléans).

Work was carried out in 1954 to replace the stained-glass windows in the choir (restored in 1974), and during the centenary in 1987, with 2 statues being moved in order to better position the wrought iron reliquary cross (placed within the primary church in 1766) and, especially, from 2011 to 2013, with the complete repair of the external covering and the replacement of the frame.

Bibliographic guidance for learning more :

- Chanoine Joseph Danigo (1987), *Séné. Centenaire de l'Église St-Patern * 1887-1987*, Vannes, imprimerie de Vannes S.A. Jean-Guy Corlay, avec 23 photographes by Claude Le Petit, Émile Morin, Jean Le Corguillé, 42 pp. (**on sale in the presbytery**) [* Centenary of St Patern Church]
- Abbé J. Mury (1933), *Ce qu'on peut apprendre dans une église (étude historique, doctrinale et liturgique, Marseille, éditions Publiroc, preface by the Very Reverend Dom Fulbert Gloriès (abbot of Sainte-Marie de la Pierre-qui-Vire, Yonne), 334 pp., 192 plates* [* What may be learned within a church (historical, doctrinal and liturgical study)]
- Jean Richard (2015), *Si Séné était conté **, s.l., éditions Donjon, 190 pp., code ISBN : 978-2-9550647-2-6, photographs in black and white [* The story of Séné]

VISITE : starting from the square in line with the diagramm page 4 *infra*

(1) The **square**, opening onto Ruelle du Recteur, enables the mighty mass of the « belfry » to be seen with its 3 levels : portal, rostrum and upper gallery. It is flanked by 2 polygonal turrets, access stairs to the bell tower.

(2) The **narthex**, the place of passage between the outside, the profane, and the « temple of God », is reduced to a simple expression of an entrance, sombre compared to the rest of the church.

(3) The **nave**, 30 metres long and 19 wide, has 2 side aisles and 3 spans.

(4) The **baptismal font** is a classic model from the end of the XIXth century, an oval bassin in black marble, on a base in the form of a balustrade, and a copper cover ; it is hardly used any more, replaced by the font at the base of the choir. This baptistry is lit by a stained-glass window of Saint John the Baptist, baptising Jesus in the Jordan, a work from 1900 by the Vannes glazier Ernest Laumonnier (1851-1920) – with the spelling mistake « Laumonier ».

(5) The **altar of the Virgin, Our Lady of Lourdes** is located within a small chapel. The raised tier frames a false tabernacle, a support for a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes (a plaster statue from the end of the XIXth century, repainted in 2013) : beautiful sculptures within the wood of the altar, with a relief image of Massabielle, the Grotto at Lourdes. To the left of the altar stands a recent statue of Saint Joseph holding the Infant Jesus (in plastic, of Italian origin), all also lit by an Ernest Laumonnier stained-glass window.

(6) The **nave lighting**, under a white vault, creates a privileged meditation space, thanks to non-figurative stained-glass windows made up of panes of glass (1974). To the east (on the left), the stained-glass windows spread the powerful brightness of the Orient in blue and green, while to the west (on the right), red, orange and ochre sifts the last glimmers of the sunset. In the middle of the nave, the rostrum, rising above the narthex (with a new balustrade in 2012), is lit by 2 stained-glass windows : near an island in the Gulf and the Noyal river, 2 pilgrims turn towards Notre-Dame de Bon-Voyage (the name of the chapel at Kérarden in Séné), greeted by a couple of active market gardeners. The nave is lined with 14 relief pictures of the Way of the Cross (enamel painting, from 1880-1890). The 12 crosses (in the image of the 12 apostles) from the consecration of the church can easily be seen.

(7) The **transept** has 4 statues ; 2 were moved (Saint Peter, Saint Cornelius) in 1987 in order to install the wrought iron reliquary cross, 3 metres high, which came from the primary church. The 2 windows are noteworthy : to the east, the calling of the first disciples (Mt. 4, 18-22) or the miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5, 1-11), flanked by the 4 evangelists and their respective symbols ; to the west, Saint Anne, mother of the Virgin, surrounded by icons praising her, Jesus (above), Saint John the Baptist (below), Saint Joseph (on the right) and Saint Joachim (on the left).

(8) A statue of **Saint Isidore** (≈ 1080-≈ 1172), a Spanish agricultural worker, patron saint of Madrid, provides a remarkable example of old Breton dress (XVIth – XVIIth century), and... not Spanish.

(9) The **east apse chapel** is the chapel of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (statue, stained-glass window), with statues (placed there around 1913 or 1914) of Saint Therese of Infant Jesus (or of Lisieux) and of Joan of Arc. The altar, in sculpted wood, was moved from the choir (between 1969 and 1987).

(10) The statue of « **Saint Corneilius** » (pope from 251 to 253) is more likely a representation of Saint Cornély (Saint Korneli in Breton), one of the saints who protects cattle, hence the representation of an ox at his feet (a traditional statue of Saint Anthony of Padua is opposite).

(11) The **west apse chapel** is the chapel of Saint Dominic (stained-glass window), dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows (the French equivalent of the Italian *Mater Dolorosa*). A statue of Saint Barbe and a statue of Saint Vitalis, a Roman legionary (father of Saint Gervais and Saint Protais), originating from a chapel of the same name (destroyed) on the Isle of Boëd, placed within the spandrel above the entrance portal before 1988 (bad weather has caused the paintwork to disappear).

(12) The **choir** is dominated by the high altar sculpted by Guillaume-Alphonse Le Brun of Lorient. The current central altar, the former ambo (1967-1987), is the old preaching chair (1886-1967). Two statues : Saint Anne, accompanied by her daughter, the Virgin Mary, as royalty (crowns) ; Saint Patern, patron of the church.

(13) The **stained-glass windows within the choir**, created in 1954, put in place on 11.07.1964 and restored in 1974, replace the stained-glass windows by Ernest Laumonier, taking up the same themes, but with modern workmanship : Saint Peter (left), Saint Patern (centre) and Saint Joseph (right).

(14) The **bell tower** is reached by a stone spiral staircase, with 72 steps, located within the narrow, polygonal west tower.

