

Architecture spoiled by too modern alterations.  
If the church has not undergone any notable restorations, the interior space was spoiled by modern alterations : the superimposition of disparate objects, the electrical system, wall coatings repaired with cement and the sound and heating systems. These different elements did not follow any aesthetic logic, preventing a clear reading of the architecture of the church (see photo).

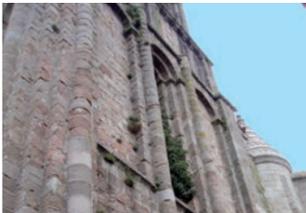


In order to restore aesthetic harmony, several liturgical objects have been placed in storage, such as the Stations of the Cross. Dating from the 19th century, it did not fit well into the Romanesque architecture of the church and the iron mounting pins were rusting in the walls (see photo).



Similarly, the installation of the bas-reliefs and commemorative plaques has been reconfigured according to aesthetic and structural criteria (avoiding rusting, for example). Finally, the electrical installation was brought up to standard and installed so as to fit into the architecture of the church.

Specific treatment of the bell tower-porch  
The restoration of the bell tower-porch was carried out between 2013 and 2014, after work had been stopped for more than a year. The masonry was drained and the large quantities of vegetation were removed (see photo).



The companions of Saint James from Barbezieux were responsible for restoring the masonry and replacing the stones that were too damaged. The rammed earth of the forecourt was also reworked to give it a more uniform appearance. The slate roof was completely relaid. It was surmounted by a new copper cockerel. The belfry in the bell tower underwent a specific treatment. This concerned the timber frame that supports the bells. It was placed on the ground in the Place des Tilleuls. The old belfry was dismantled to make way for the new structure. Its installation was not without difficulty. It required the use of a high-reach crane to unload the 65 elements that form the belfry and to raise these elements to more than 40 meters above the ground in order to slide them into the bell tower (see photo). The oak beams were then assembled in the bell tower to create the new 5 meter high belfry.



### A major project in terms of its size and funding

The diagnosis carried out by the chief architect of historical monuments was accompanied by a work schedule. Spread over more than 4 years, it was organized into five major phases : consolidation of the nave, exterior restoration of the nave and the apse, interior improvements, external restoration of the bell tower, internal restoration of the bell tower and the forecourt.



Due to the scale of the work, the church of Saint-Pierre was one of the most important restoration projects carried out in the Confolentais area (including the castle of Saint-Germain).

Important in terms of its duration, the site was also important in terms of its cost, estimated at around € 1,367 636 including tax. As it is a historical monument, the State provided 35% of the funding for the work. The Region provided 15% and the Department and the Municipality contributed 25% each. The contracting authority, that is to say the body which commissioned the works, was the town council of Lesterps. The project manager, carrying out the work, was the chief architect of historic monuments Mr. Dodeman. He was supported in his task by an auditor of historical monuments, in charge of studying the estimates and the financial monitoring of the project. Restoration work began in 2008 and was due to be completed in 2012. Following a halt in 2011, work resumed in 2013 and focused on the facades and the treatment of the bell tower. Work finally came to an end in the summer of 2014.

### Coming together : the church and the abbey gardens

The land behind the covered market, formerly occupied by part of the church and the cemetery, had long remained without any particular use. As part of a move to enhance and develop the centre of the village and improve access, the town council decided to create a green space : the abbey gardens.

To complete this project, an archaeological diagnosis was first carried out. INRAP dug several trenches behind the halls and in the former cloister between September 24 and October 8, 2018. The diagnosis confirmed several hypotheses. Thus, one of the trenches uncovered the axial chapel, a determining factor in establishing the original length of the church : 80m between the bell towerporch and the axial chapel. The trenches also revealed the defensive system of the village and its displacement after the construction of the medieval apse in the 12th century. The landscaping of the gardens was accompanied by the creation of a replica of the fountain previously in the centre of the main courtyard (see photo).



In addition to being landscaped, the abbey gardens are a place of remembrance dedicated to the Righteous Among the Nations. The term "Righteous" designates a non-Jew who saved Jews at the risk of his life. In Lesterps, Marie-Elisabeth Lacalle - Sister Saint-Cybard hid little Josie Levy for eight months by passing her off as her niece. Since 2010, Sister Saint-Cybard has been one of the 26 Justes of Charente. The abbey gardens were inaugurated on 22nd September 2019, in the presence of the Ambassador of Israel, the representative of Yad Vashem, the Bishop of Angoulême and elected officials.

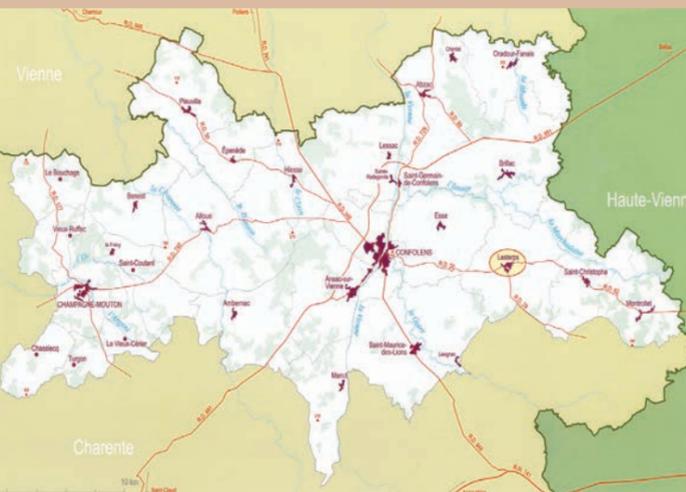
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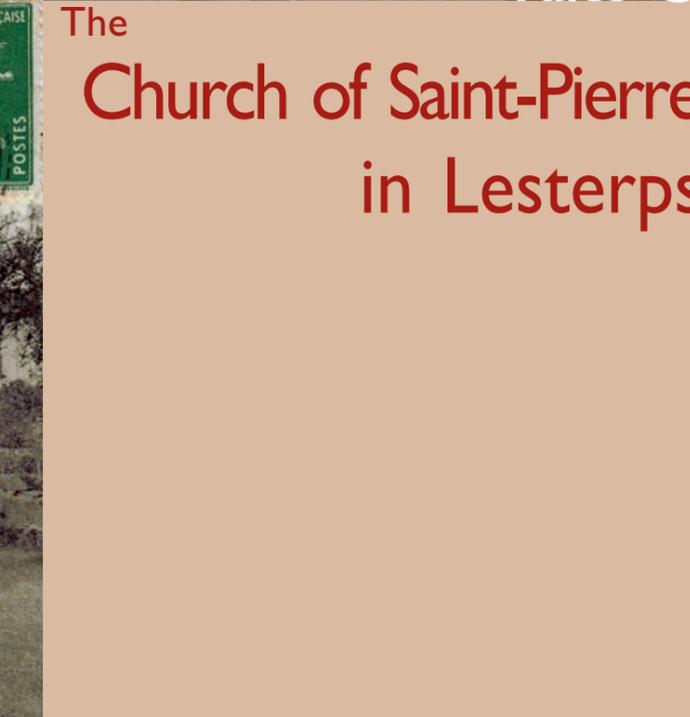
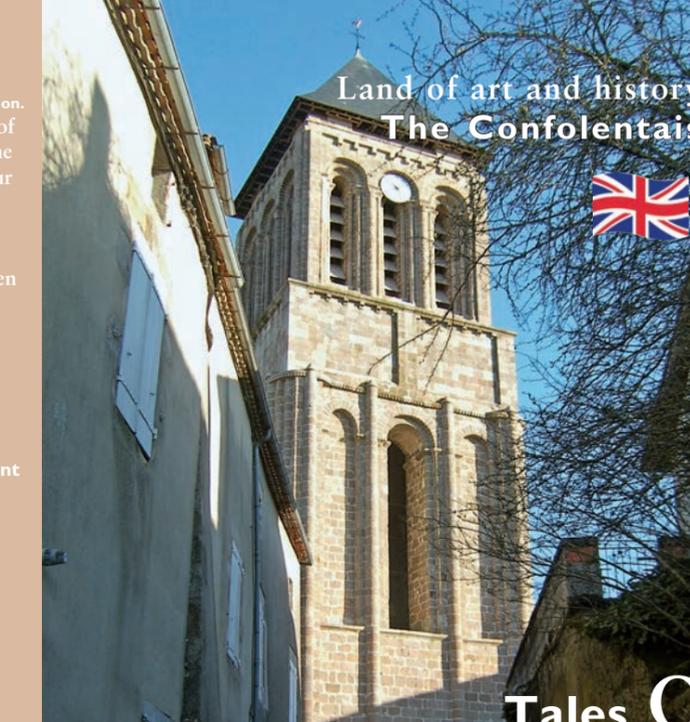
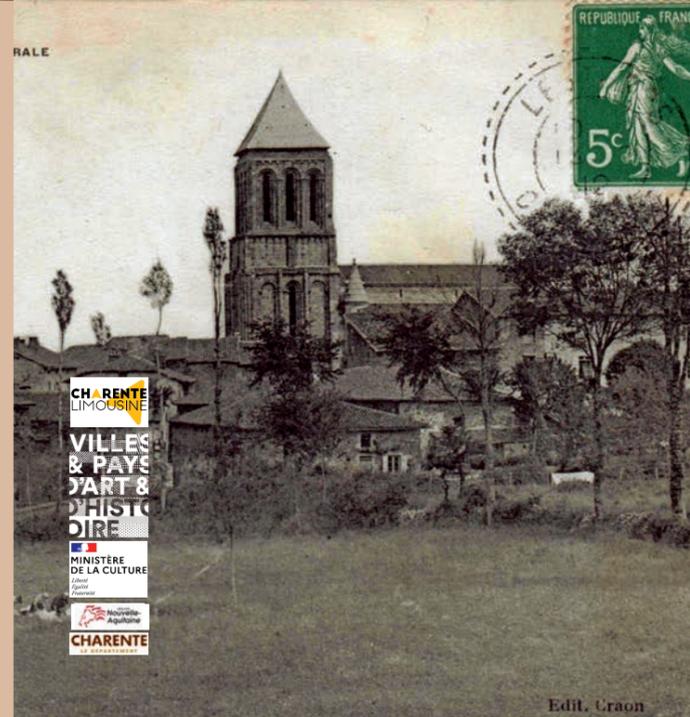


This brochure was produced thanks to the results of the heritage inventory, conducted between 2003 and 2006 by the Community of Communes of Confolentais and the general inventory service of the cultural heritage of the Poitou-Charentes region.  
To contact the service : 05.49.36.30.07  
<http://inventaire.poitou-charentes.fr>

Graphic design and printing : Imprimerie I.G.E. Edigraphic in accordance with the graphicharter LM communiquer.  
Photos credits : Région Nouvelle Aquitaine, Service de l'inventaire général du patrimoine culturel, C.Rome / Y. Oury / Z. Lambert / Communauté de Communes de Charente Limousine  
17th century engraving ; private collection  
Engraving of Léon Drouyn ; cadastral plan of the church : Charente County Archives  
Plan of the church : extract of a plan produced by Valentin de Courcel in 1912  
The church before and during the work : Denis Dodeman, ACMH  
Plans of the interior of the church after restoration : Yann Bonner, Pays de Charente Limousine  
Raising the beams of the belfry : Anic Grandjean  
Cover page : the bell tower-porch, CCCL, the bell tower seen from a water point, old postcard, private collection.  
Texts : service Pays d'art et d'histoire, C. Deveza, 2015. Revised edition 2020



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..in the company of a guide approved by the Ministry of Culture and Communication. The guide welcomes you and gives you the keys to understand the scale of a place, the development of the town from one quarter to another and the surrounding villages. The guide knows the area perfectly and he is at your disposal. Do not hesitate to ask him your questions.  
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It is at your disposal for any project.  
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The Pays d'art et d'histoire offers visits all through the year by reservation. Information available at the tourist office.



## Its history

The abbey in Lesterps was founded at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and given to the Holy See around 1032 by the Lord of Chabanais Jourdain I. The first known abbot is Gautier, son of knight of Confolens and canon regular in Dorat. He took the head of the abbey a few years after the donation of Jourdain I and introduced the rule of Saint-Augustin.

In 1040, in the absence of Gautier, who had gone on a crusade, a conflict opposed the count of the Marche Aldebert and the lord of Chabanais Jourdain II. He refused to recognize the donation of 1032 and transformed the abbey into a stronghold. In retaliation, Aldebert took the abbey, killed the canons and burnt the church with the inhabitants inside. The Count of the Marche was excommunicated and, as a sign of atonement, had to finance the reconstruction of the building.

Gautier followed the work on his return; he died in 1070 a few months before the dedication of the church. The current nave and the first four levels of the bell tower date from this period. It was Adhemar, Gautier's successor, who completed the work. The church was extended in the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century through the addition of a Gothic choir with an ambulatory and radiating chapels. Reserved for the canons, the choir was built at the instigation of Father Rannulf. It is difficult to imagine this part of the church which has now disappeared. A 17<sup>th</sup> century engraving gives a probable reproduction (see photo).



The abbey was besieged by the Black Prince during the Hundred Years War without any damage. In 1568, during the Wars of Religion, the Protestants looted the abbey and set the monastic buildings on fire. It remained in ruins for a century until the arrival of Charles-François de la Vieuville, bishop of Rennes, in 1657. He introduced the canons regular attached to the

congregation of Sainte-Geneviève. He had the church restored from 1660 and had the conventual buildings built at the same time.

The condition of the church gradually deteriorated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the point that in 1738, its worship was banned in favour of the church of Saint-Quentin. During the Revolution, the canons still present were driven out. Parish activity resumed in 1803, first in the apse and then in the nave. Due to lack of maintenance, the apse collapsed on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1815, causing the upper part of the nave to fall. The collapsed part was used as a stone quarry and it was not until the early 1850s that the ruins were cleared. However, work was carried out on the church. The engraving by Léo Drouyn shows that in 1847 a wall was erected to close the nave (see photo).

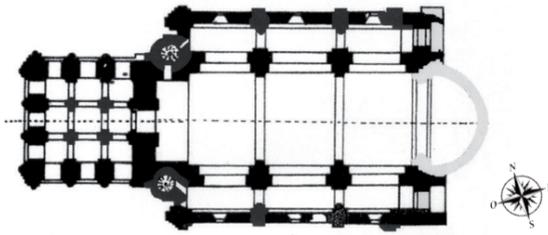


The most important works were undertaken from 1851 to 1884 under the direction of the architect Paul Abadie the younger. He supervised the repair of the bell tower, the complete restoration of the north facade, the raising of the nave and the construction of the semi-circular apse. In 1879, following a collapse, Paul Abadie had two supports in the vault of the nave replaced.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the church only underwent maintenance work. But the building needed to be restored and the town launched a major campaign in 2008. The church encountered three major problems : the vaults collapsed and caused the walls to lean; damp was omnipresent and vegetation was growing in the masonry and on the roofs; the interior layout had to be harmonized.

Work began in 2008 under the direction of the chief architect of historic monuments, Mr. Dodeman. It ended in the summer of 2014.

## Its architecture



The current abbey church is made up of a bell tower-porch, a nave flanked by two side aisles and a semi-circular apse. The bell tower-porch located to the west measures 43 m and consists of five levels delimited by string-courses. While it is unique in the Confolentais area, it has similarities with other Romanesque bell towers-porches of Poitou-Charentes (Saint-Porchaire in Poitiers) and Limousin (Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat). The first level (ground floor) consists of three semicircular vaulted corridors.

The central corridor is wider and leads to the door of the church. The sides are pierced with three openings. This level corresponds to the porch and more precisely to the narthex. Traditionally, the narthex is associated with the reception of catechumens, or unbaptized people. The second level is blind. The third exterior level corresponds to the first floor on the inside. Each side is pierced by a semicircular bay set between two blind semicircular arches. The fourth level, set back from the third, is blind. It houses the octagonal cupola (also called cupola over pendentives) on the first floor. It has pilasters at the angles and in the centre of each face. A cornice on modillion marks the passage from the fourth to the fifth and last level. It corresponds to the second floor on the inside (location of the bells). The sides are pierced with three semicircular bays with three arches falling on columns with capitals.

Two staircase turrets are placed at the angles formed by the junction of the bell tower-porch and the nave. They have a conical stone roof (see photo).



The north and south elevations are supported by flat buttresses. These buttresses mark the spans. Each bay is pierced to the north and south of a semi-circular bay. The nave, which is higher, projects beyond the side aisles. It has small rectangular openings under the cornice. The semicircular apse is pierced with three semicircular bays. Two flat buttresses support the walls between the bays.

First the porch must be crossed to enter the church. It is reached by climbing four steps. The corridors of the porch have semicircular vaults on transverse arches. The cruciform pillars with capitals receive the transverse arches of the vaults and the arcades.

The central corridor, wider than the others, leads to the front door of the church. This door is surmounted by a saddleback lintel. Without any decoration, it appears very simple in comparison with the portals of other churches. But it is the bell tower-porch which performs the function of representation usually occupied by the portal.

Once through the door, you gain access to a wide space of about half a bay. It corresponds to the location of the gallery.

This is supported by a semicircular arch and is set between the two staircase turrets. The one on the right of the gallery gives access to the gallery while the one on the left leads to the vaults. The nave and the aisles are separated by three semicircular arches resting on cruciform pillars. The nave has a slightly lowered barrel vault supported by three transverse arches. The side aisles also have barrel vaults. A string-course marks the start of the vault of the nave. The openings pierced in the walls of the side aisles are set in blind arches. The south wall is pierced with a door which leads to the old cloister.

Bas-reliefs and sculpted capitals from the old collapsed choir have also been reused in this wall. The bas reliefs represent Christ in Majesty, the Virgin holding the blessing Child and a figure on horseback who could be Saint Gautier.



One of the capitals is decorated with pine cones. It would have been in the monks' choir because the pine cone is a symbol of eternity. The other capital consists of three scenes : two virgins with a flask of Holy Oils, Jesus coming out of the tomb and two beheaded guardians of the tomb (see photo). The epitaph of Rannulf, buried inside the church, has been placed on the north wall.

The transverse arch closest to the choir acts as a triumphal arch. It is raised by one step from the nave. Secondary altars installed on the east side walls stand to either side of this entrance to the choir. These altars are integrated into semicircular arcades. The choir is has a half-dome vault. It is divided by two string courses : a first one located under the bays and a second one at the start of the half-dome vault. The three semicircular bays that light up the choir are set between pilasters.

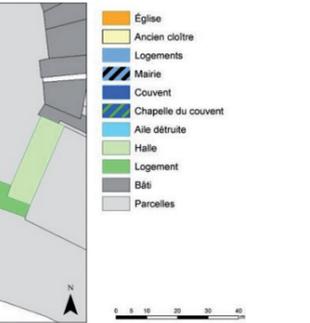
## The old conventual buildings

The conventual buildings and the cloister were built around 1660 on the initiative of Abbot Charles-François de la Vieuville. They stand on the site of old, undocumented buildings. They mainly reflect the new organization of the abbey with the establishment of canons regular living in community buildings. Previously, the canons had individual houses. The buildings are located to the south of the abbey church. There were initially three main buildings (east, south and west) forming a square around the cloister. The western building was destroyed in 1901.



When they were built, each building had a specific function. The west building (in sky blue) housed the refectory, the dormitories and the attics. The south building (in blue) was occupied by the abbot's accommodation, a door giving access to the cloister. The east building (in navy blue) was reserved for canons and communicates with the abbey church. This building was rebuilt around 1775 as we see it today.

Between 1791 and 1793, the west and south buildings were sold as national property. The west building was converted into common areas while the south building was divided into two dwellings. The building was not sold and it was transformed into a rectory. The interior was decorated in stucco which has been partially preserved. The town hall for its part moved into the former office of the abbot, in the eastern corner of the south building. In 1845, the municipality planned to build a school and a market on the site of the old apse. At that date, the village hall, located to the north of the church along the main street, was in ruins (see photo building 67).



In addition, the town did not have a school house. The school (in dark green) was built as an extension of the church and used pillars from the old transept on its facade. The hall (in light green) was built at right angles to the school. Both constructions were completed in 1855. The school was also built to support the east building. The architect adapted the height of the school to this existing building. Indeed, the old gallery of the south transept and the top of its two semicircular bays are visible (see photo).



The remains of the west building and the cloister were demolished between 1901 and 1902. The school was transferred to a new building after 1938 and the building became communal property.

When the last priest of the parish died in 1989, the presbytery welcomed the Brothers of the Resurrection and then in 2000 the Sisters of Bon Secours. It is no longer in use today.

## Restoration work necessary

The rules for the restoration of historical monuments. Restoration consists in restoring to a monument or an object the state or the appearance which it had at a given moment in history. Often it seeks to make its "utilisation" or use again possible.

The restoration of a monument is highly codified and it must respect three major ethical principles defined in the International Charter of Venice (1964) :

- clearness : the restorations must not be confused with the original work.
- reversibility : any intervention must be able to disappear during future work without leaving any traces.
- respect for the original creation : in the absence of reliable historical sources, the restorer does not have the right to reconstruct a missing element. Since the major restoration campaigns of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the church in Lesterps has not undergone any major works. Over time, various problems have weakened the structure of the building. In order to remedy this, the town council of Lesterps called on the chief architect of historic monuments to carry out a preliminary study. This study identified the major problems to be solved.

### A building ravaged by damp and vegetation.

Damp, present throughout the building, caused damage in different ways. The absence of gutters led to water infiltration as well as rising damp in the walls. Stains on the vaults and peeling plaster were signs of this (see photo).



The infiltrations were greater on the roof, where many tiles were damaged by the frost (see photo).



Finally, vegetation had overrun the roofs and buttresses of the church and the bell tower. In addition to being a good indicator of the moisture level in the walls, vegetation, especially the roots, destabilizes the masonry by attaching itself to the binder between the stones and by exerting pressure on the masonry. It was therefore important to clean up the stonework by draining the masonry. Once the drainage was completed, the vegetation was removed to treat the stonework directly and repair it if necessary.

After the renovation of the masonry, work was able to concentrate on the plasterwork. The exterior renderings of the church underwent special treatment. Following various colour tests, the final choice used different colours of render on the facades. Thus, the render applied to the north elevation is pinker and lighter than the one applied to the south elevation (see photo).



This differentiation was based on samples as well as on written sources. The interior plaster was also completely redone. Due to the colour of the plaster, the interior appears lighter and the traces of damp have disappeared (see photo).



### A church which suffered from structural problems.

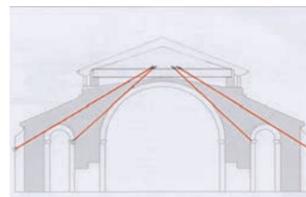
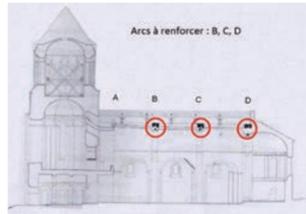
The problem was situated in the vaults which were sagging and causing the walls to lean. This structural problem is found in many Romanesque buildings. The barrel vault, which is extremely heavy, exerts great pressure on the walls. A "counter-buttress" system is necessary in order to distribute the loads evenly down to the foundations. However, the church in Lesterps does not have any counter-buttress system, and under the pressure of the vaults, the walls tended to lean outwards. Cracks and deformations then appeared in the vaults (see photo). The risk, ultimately, was that they would collapse.



To deal with these weaknesses, the church was provided with tie rods "forming a clamp". Made of fibreglass, the tie rods are glued to the stone and fixed to metal beams located under the roof frame (see photo).



The tie rods are placed on three transverse arches, with four tie rods per arch : two at the connection between the nave and the aisles and two on the exterior walls of the aisles (see photos).



The action of the various tie rods, which are invisible, limits the movement of the walls. The company UBC Ingénierie was responsible for the implementation of this system.

### Zoom : Saint Peter, patron saint of the church.

Saint Peter is one of the apostles. Jesus chose him to be the "foundation stone" of the Church of which he was the first pope. He was considered the first to baptize and perform miracles. He died in Rome between 64 and 67. According to tradition, he was crucified upside down because he considered himself unworthy to die like Christ. He is often depicted as an elderly man with short hair and a short beard, wearing a tunic like the other apostles. His symbols are the keys, referring to his role as founder of the Church, the book and the rooster.