

VISIT OF THE
MUSEUM



MUSEUM JOSEPH FAU

Ancient furniture, tapestries, statuary and remains of the cloister

The art and history of Conques from the Middle Ages to the 19th century.

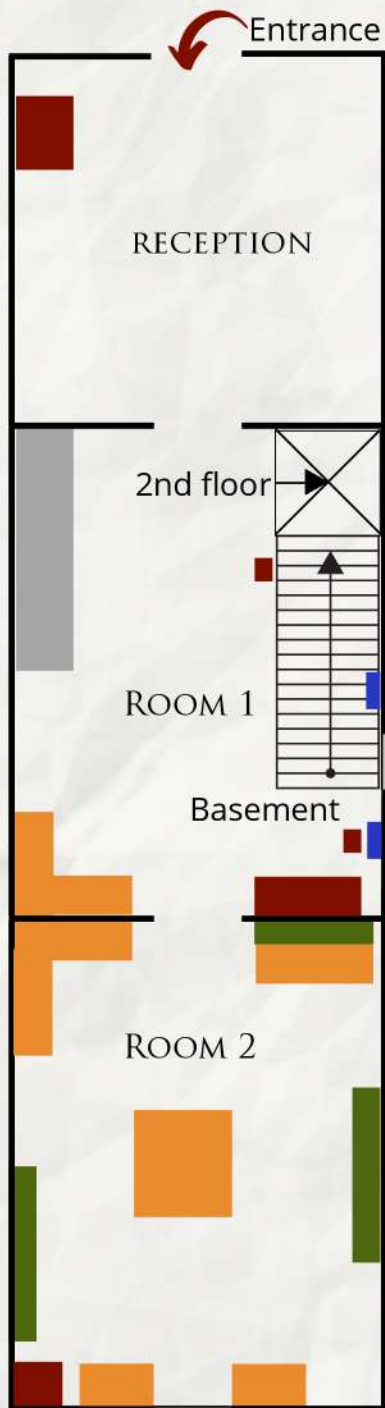


1ST FLOOR

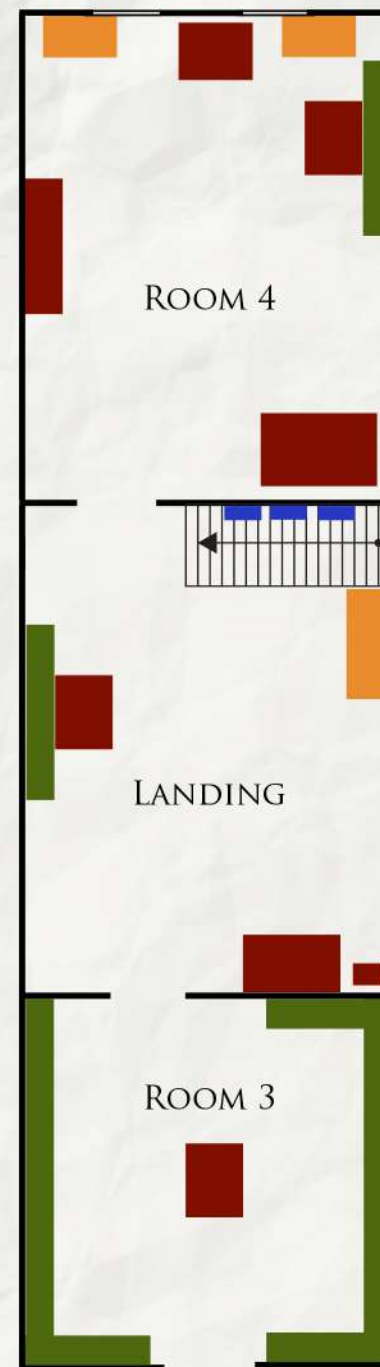
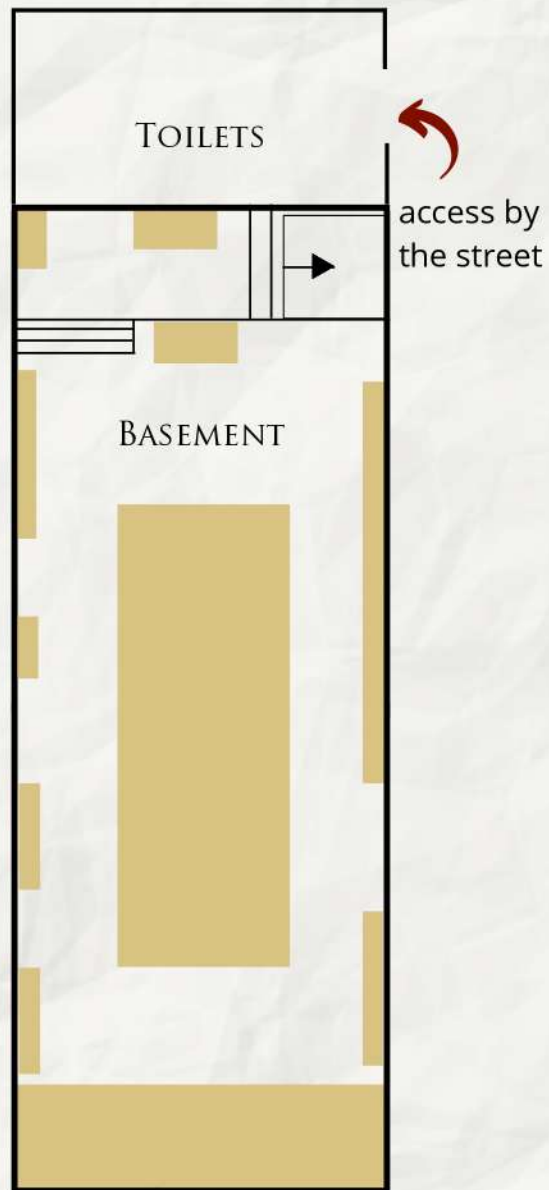


2ND FLOOR

- Statuary 15th 18th c.
- Furniture 16th 19th c.
- Graphic art 19th c.
- Tapestries 17th c.
- Lapidary 11th 12th c.
- Tactile equipment



BASEMENT



THE BUILDING OF THE MUSEUM

This building, a former and remodelled house, dates back from the 17th-18th centuries. It was probably a former canon's residence acquired at the time of the separation of the Church's property during the French Revolution. It was then part of the monastic buildings. During the 20th century, it became a residence for Dr Joseph Fau's in-laws.



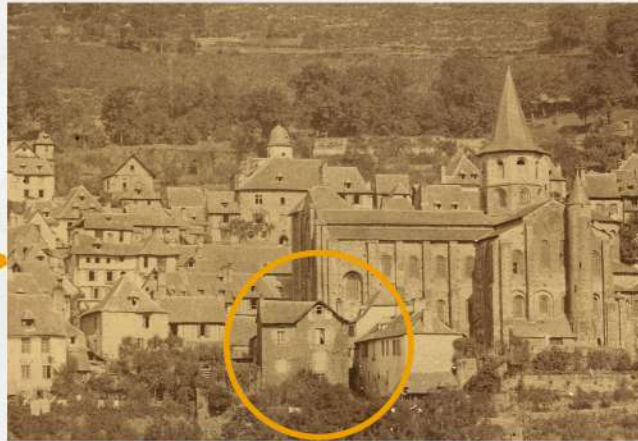
Joseph Fau

The doctor Joseph Fau was the mayor of Conques between 1953 and 1977.

He worked in the elaboration of this museum wanting to preserve the artefacts related to the heritage of Conques, the life of the canons, the remains of the cloister and the religious furniture (from St-Thomas church, St-Roch chapel, Saint-Marcel church...). Faithful to his memory, his successors continued his work and named the museum after him.



View of Conques before 1881, the museum in the foreground



A glimpse of life in the past



This old house retains elements of a traditional kitchen located in the actual entrance, with the fireplace, the warming pans, the ashtray and the stone sink.

About the coats of arms



A coat of arms is visible above the door of the adjoining house. The upper floor of this house used to communicate with the rooms of the actual museum. This coat of arms might belong to the canon "de Flory" or "Fleury", who commissioned the series of tapestries of Mary Magdalene exhibited here and dating around 1634.



Saint-Roch chapel

This small building is located at the bottom of the village. Once a strategic location for a stronghold documented as early as the 11th century, it was previously named Notre-Dame du Château. It took the vocation of St-Roch during the cholera epidemic of the 19th century.



The monastic buildings

A true jewel of Romanesque art, remarkable for its architecture and sculpture, the Abbey Church of Sainte-Foy was built from the middle of the 11th century to the first quarter of the 12th, following a more modest edifice dating from the 10th century.

Many of the museum's artefacts come from the Abbey Church and also from other buildings of the former monastery, such the presbytery or the canon's houses.

WHERE DO THE ARTEFACTS COME FROM?

Donations

Some artefacts of the museum were donated by inhabitants of Conques. This is the case for the cornice decorated with a griffin on display in the basement of the museum. It was donated by a resident of the village, Madame Bousquet, following its discovery during work in her house.



The church of St.-Thomas

Formerly located on the actual Place Chirac, the parish church of Conques was dedicated to Saint Thomas of Canterbury. Already disappeared in the 19th century, its buttresses are still visible in the old ramparts of the abbey.



The Rosary Chapel

The Rosary Chapel, also known as the Abbots' Chapel, is located on the East end of the cloister, next to the former Chapter house. It has a beautiful painted ceiling with Renaissance motifs.



STATUARY

Rouergate statuary in the 15th century

The style of the statue of Saint Foy is representative of local artistic production in the late Middle Ages. It is stylistically close to other examples to be found not far from Conques, such as the Virgin of Pity from Grand-Vabre or the recumbent statue from Belcastel.



Recumbent of
Alzias de Saunhac , lord
of Belcastel,
15th century



Piéta of Grand-Vabre
15th century



View of the entrance of the abbey church with
the statue of Saint Foy (before 1881)



Sainte Foy, 15th c. (room 2)

Stone

The stone statues in the museum are mostly made out of limestone. The use of this material generally guarantees a good conservation over time. There are different types of limestone, the choice of a finer grained limestone allows the realization of precise details. Traces of polychromy are still visible on some works.



Virgin with Child, 15th c.

Wood

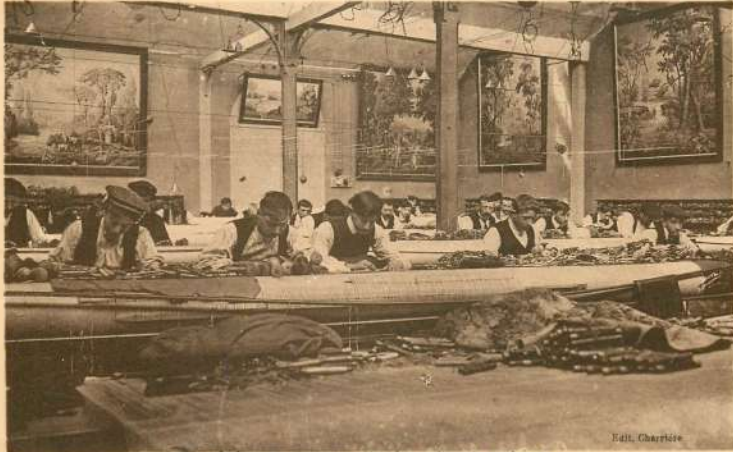
Different woods can be used for statuary such as walnut or lime, which are soft and easy to work with. The wood can then be coated with a primer and receive the layer of polychromy or gilding.

Wooden statuary is fragile, very sensitive to alterations due to humidity and insects.



Saint Marcel, 16th c.

THE TAPESTRIES FROM FELLETIN



Aubusson (Creuse) — Vue des Ateliers de Tapisserie
La Manufacture de Tapis et Tapisseries R. et L. HAMOT, 75, rue de Richelieu, Paris

Tapestry workshop at Aubusson in 1933.

In the 17th century, after a ban on Flemish tapestry production, weavers began to settle in Auvergne and formed guilds. Two towns became important places of production: Aubusson, which obtained the title of royal manufacture in 1665, followed by Felletin four years later.

The tapestries from Felletin, like those preserved in Conques, can be identified by their brown border and the mention M. R. FELLETIN.

Workshops were usually family owned, combining makers, merchants and traders, with women often specializing in the finishing details.

Members of the nobility, clergy or wealthy bourgeois commissioned these rich tapestries inspired from paintings or prints. The numerous religious scenes had both a liturgical and decorative purposes.



Commanditaire



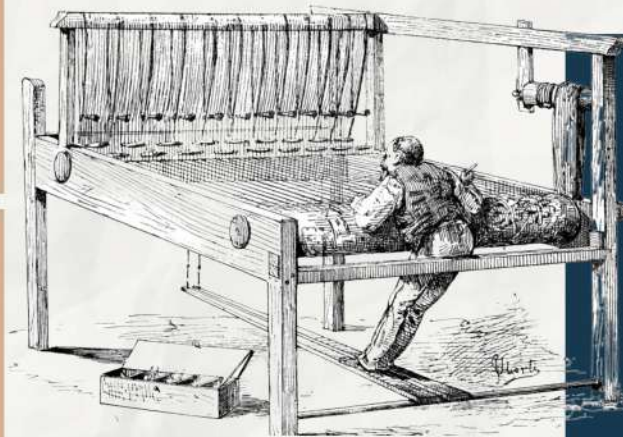
The abbot Jean de Mignot
(1594-1625)

In 1622 he ordered three tapestries for his pontifical chair.



The canon François de Flory

In 1634, he paid 300 pounds "tournois" for the eight pieces of the Mary Magdalene serie.



The techniques of tapestry

Two weaving techniques coexisted: the high heddle made on a vertical loom and the low heddle, as here in Conques, on a horizontal loom operated by pedals, with warps mounted according to a pattern (or cardboard) placed upside down. The heddles are the cords linking each warp thread.

OPPULENT FURNITURE



This old postcard illustrates an interior before 1903, more precisely the "Monseigneur's room" located in the presbytery. It shows a rich furniture composed of the front piece of a fireplace with its painted and sculpted decors, a four-posted bed, an ornated chest and a large wall tapestry. Some of these furniture have been preserved and are on display in the museum.

A monumental front piece and its decoration



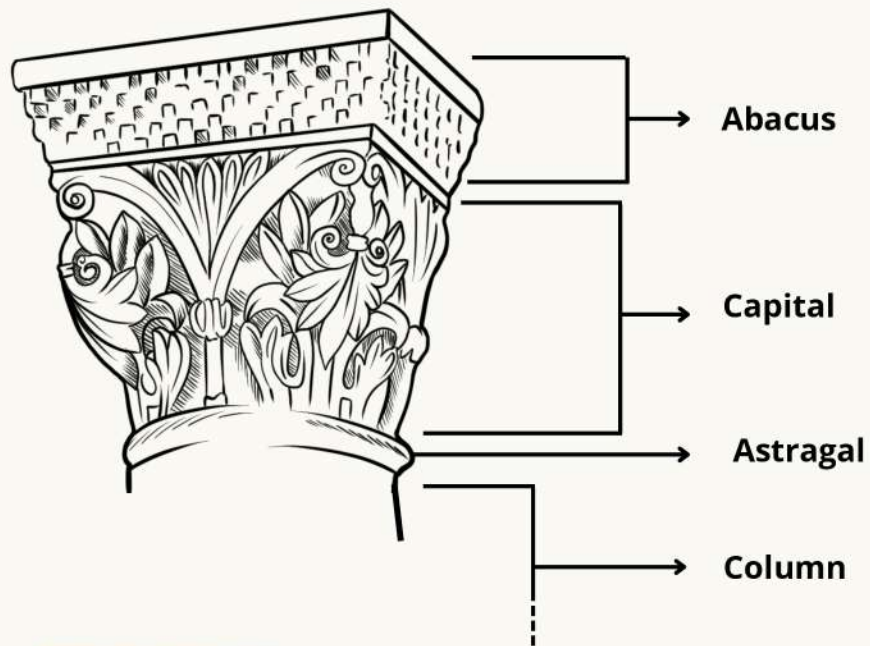
Guillaume Chirac

Guillaume Chirac was a master carpenter from Conques in the 17th century. This canopy bed made with pieces of former retables is preserved in the museum and carries his name. Two altarpieces preserved in the abbey church can also be attributed to him.



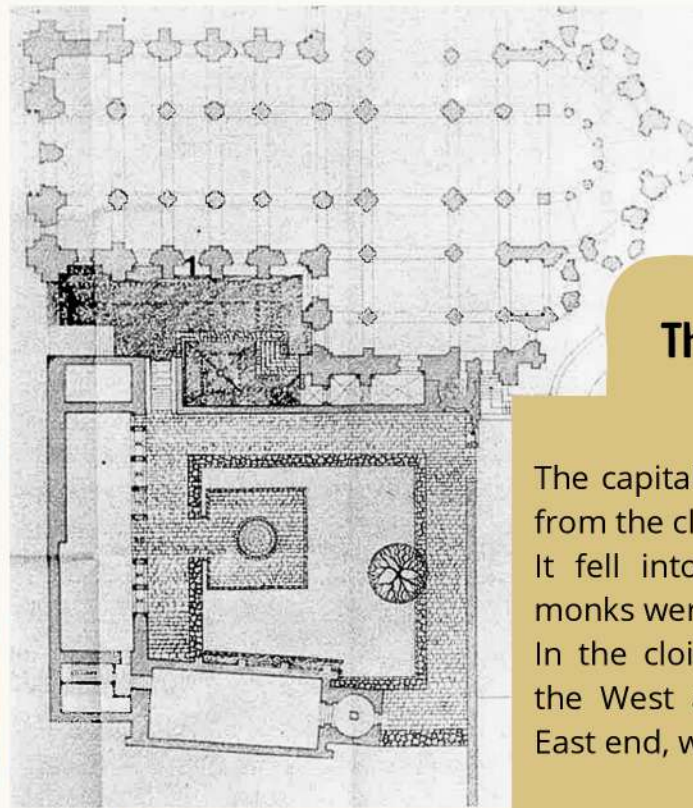
Altarpiece of the Holy Family
1644

THE LAPIDARY



The workshop of the Abbot Bégon

Several stone cutters workshops decorated the capitals and other architectural elements. The most characteristic is probably the "Abbot Bégon's workshop", at the origin of the capitals of the cloister and some of the abbey church upper-gallery. This workshop is named after the Abbot Bégon III, at the head of the Abbey of Conques between 1087 and 1107, its most prosperous years.



The Romanesque cloister

The capitals of the lapidary museum come from the cloister built by abbot Bégon III. It fell into disuse when the Benedictine monks were replaced by canons. In the cloister area, the refectory was on the West and the Chapter House on the East end, with the dormitory above it.

The central fountain, made of serpentine stone, was reassembled from original remains in the 1970s after archaeological surveys.

Medieval patterns

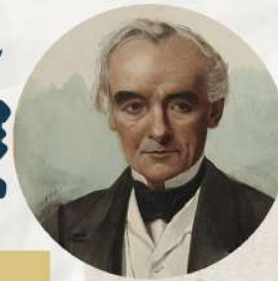
A lot of ornaments decorate these cloister remains and illustrate the imagination and skills of the stone cutters of the 12th century.

Different types of motifs are visible: plants ornaments either realistic or stylized, a rich bestiary of different creatures at times fantastic or even, historiated scenes illustrating characters such as knights or religious men.





CONQUES IN THE 19TH CENTURY



Prosper Mérimée

A famous writer and inspector of the *Monuments Historiques*, Prosper Mérimée arrived in Conques in 1837 during one of his inspection tours, to identify the heritage to be saved. He allowed the rediscovery of the Abbey Church that was in a terrible state of dilapidation.

In his *Notes d'un voyage en Auvergne*, in 1838, he said about Conques:

"I was not prepared to find so much richness in such a desert."

Chronology of the restoration works

- **1837:** Launching of the first works led by Etienne Boissonade, architect of the Department
- **1840:** Classification of the Abbey Church as a Historical monument
- **1874:** Resumption of work by Jean-Camille Formigé
- **1875:** Restoration of the choir and rediscovery of the chest-reliquary of Saint Foy
- **1881:** Raising of the two facade towers



Drawing from J-C. Formigé

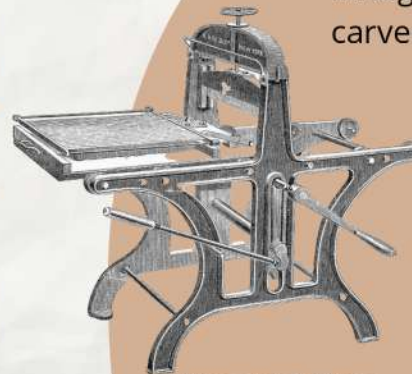
"Les Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France"

From 1820, Baron Taylor and Charles Nodier began to publish a collection illustrating the heritage of the French regions. This taste for the remnants of the past is characteristic of the Romantic movement and contributed to the emergence of a heritage consciousness. The prints of the abbey made for this occasion are among the oldest existing representations of the abbey.



The technique of lithography

Developed at the very end of the 18th century, the lithography is a technique of printing from a drawing carved on a limestone.



Lithograph Press

Simpler and more economical than the techniques that once existed, it became very popular in the 19th century. It was used to illustrate books and to make advertising posters or drawings. It allowed a better knowledge of the past heritage and monuments.



+33 (0)5 65 72 85 00
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