

whose keystones peak at more than 31 meters. The space is punctuated by three levels: the arches composing the bay, the triforium, and the high openings. The nave's vault which collapsed completely after the bombings and fire of 1940 was entirely restored afterwards. NB: the pillars' tops do not end in capitals but they fade away plant-like into the vault's stone interlacing.



Central gate, antique Renaissance leaves, photograph, coll. Macqueron, Public Library Abbeville

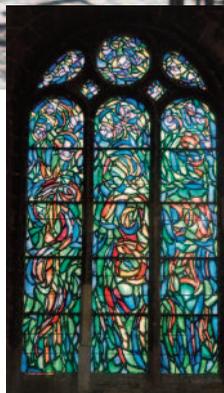
All the church windows were destroyed by the fire. Today, some openings are decorated with church windows created by the American artist William Einstein at the end of the 1960s. The artist wanted to convey, into the glass embellished with grisaille, a thought or an image. So the Trinity can be found in the three high openings in the middle of the choir or in the south aisle (from the choir): Adam and Eve and the



Altarpiece representing the Nativity (detail), XVth century, polychromatic stone.



The Collegiate church's choir after the bombings, 1940? Coll. Tourist Office Abbeville.

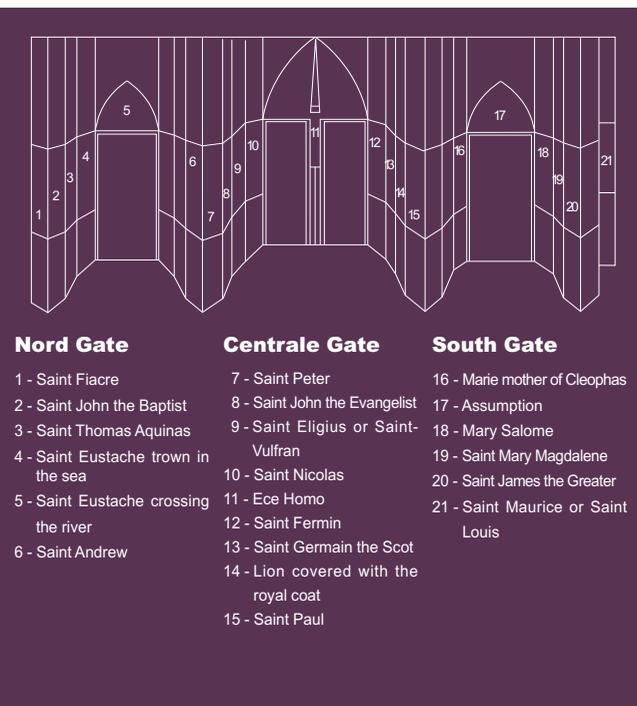


Einstein W., Adam and Eve and the serpent, lower window (South), 1970.

serpent, then driven off Paradise and finally working in sorrow. Finally, the three paintings (from the same artist) represent the Last Supper, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection as well as the fourteen Stations of the Cross.

On both sides of the main nave each aisle leads to three chapels showing 15-16th centuries altarpieces (Saint Ann Chapel, Saint Louis and Chapel of the Saint Angels-Saint Luke).

Many works were preserved from decline during post-war decades and have been restored since then as in 2002 (the 17th century preaching pulpit). Other important pieces of work such as the choir's gates (ranked among the Ancient Monumentson the 1840 list) need to be restored.



### SAINT VULFRAN COLLEGIATE CHURCH parvis Saint Vulfran, Abbeville.

**OPENING :** April to september from tuesday to saturday, 10 am to 6 pm - monday, sunday and public holiday, 2 pm to 6 pm. October to march from tuesday to sunday, 2 pm to 5 pm. Closed during the 2nd and 3rd weeks of january.

**INFORMATION :** Service Patrimoine, Carmel - Maison du Patrimoine, 34-36 rue des Capucins, 80100 Abbeville, 03 22 20 27 05 - patrimoine@ville-abbeville.fr

**INFORMATION :** BAIE DE SOMME TOURIST OFFICE, 1 place de l'amiral Courbet, tél. 03 22 24 27 92 www.abbeville-tourisme.com - Audioguide beschikbaar.



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Saint Vulfran Collegiate Church

# Abbeville

# Saint Vulfran Collegiate Church

At the beginning of the 11th Century, the counts of Ponthieu had the relics of Vulfran moved to their capital : Abbeville.

In order to welcome and keep these precious relics, they decided to build a new edifice. The church, dedicated to Saint Nicholas and Saint Fermin, was destroyed and replaced by a larger building covered with thatch.



Reliquary bust of St-Vulfran, polychromatic wood, 17th-19th century, inscribed on the list of historic monuments, restored thanks to the Amis de St-Vulfran patronage and to the St-Wandrille abbey.

## The patron saint of Abbeville and Ponthieu

Vulfran was born in the middle of the 7th century and of a noble family closely related to the royal court. He became Archbishop of Sens at the end of the 7th century and retired to the monastery of Fontenelle (Saint-Wandrille today).

From then on, he went to evangelize Friesland, -in the North of actual Holland- where he accomplished many miracles. Back in France, he ended his days in the Abbey of Fontenelle where he was buried.



Apse of Saint Vulfran, view from the merchant canal, 19th century, English engraving, Coll. Macqueron, Public Library Abbeville.

That church remained until 1346. The Kings of England –who were counts of Ponthieu then- had a new building erected in 1363 (thus founding Saint Vulfran of Abbeville). This church was situated about level with the present choir of the collegiate church.

The dilapidated church of 1363 was destroyed as well, in the following century. The kings of France, counts of Ponthieu from then on, and haberdashery merchants vastly paid for the construction of the church.

The construction of such a massive edifice was problematic in the middle of a very marshy ground (the branch of the Somme which was nearby was only filled in around 1870). The solution that was implemented was to erect piles. Oak posts of about 2 metres were driven in the ground and linked with a sort of mortar. The creation of this slab made the construction possible.

The foundation stone was laid in 1488. The façade and the nave were put up afterwards. The very first mass was celebrated in one of the side chapels in 1524. The legend says that Saint Fermin, discontented with the fact of being placed in only one tour of the north transept, decided to detach from the rest of the edifice. So Saint Vulfran reminded him

that he was about to fall in the Somme... In fact, the soft soil is at the origin of the leaning tower which hasn't moved ever since.

The building work continued for some more years but as money ran out, the site broke off in 1539. The best evidence of that sudden pause is the transept's wall with protruding stones (visible on the left-hand side of the church) still waiting for the continuation of the building work. The building site only hastily resumed in 1661. It only took a few years to build the choir in a very simplified gothic style as opposed to the western façade. In 1663, the church was finally finished.

## A MASTERPIECE OF FLAMBOYANT GOTHIC

Today known as one of Flamboyant Gothic's masterpieces, the Collegiate Church has the characteristic elements of this architectural style : flying buttresses and pinnacles on either side of the nave, stone filigree, rose window and large openings with lively window tracery enliven the façades and more specifically the front which rises up to 56 meters. The theme of the Trinity is developed : the division into three different parts can

be found in many places of the building, three chapels on each side of the nave, three portals, three horizontal and vertical parts on the façade. The western façade is decorated with branches and interlacing and covered with statues which were offered by the different guilds or other parishes of the city. So you can find Saint Fiacre patron of gardeners, Saint Andrew patron of butchers and of an ancient parish of Abbeville, Saint Peter recognizable from his keys and Saint Nicholas patron of young people. Underneath the rosace, into the window canopy, the Trinity is represented with the Heavenly Father holding in his hands the Son on the cross. Before the French Revolution, they were linked by the dove of the Holy Spirit which was situated between the Father's beard and the Son's head.

The leaves of the central portals date back to 1550 and are the only elements remaining after the 1940 fire. They are embellished with (cf. opposite) scenes of the Virgin's Life [A], with a horsemen frieze [B] and with illustrations of the Apostles and Evangelists [C]. Inside, the visitor can appreciate a nave



Saint Mary-Salome and her children Saint James the Greater and Saint John the Evangelist, element of the western façade, stone, 15-16th century, Polychromatic stone (Pierre Lheureux 1503-1504)