

History of the White Church

A small guide for visitors

Guest(s),

You are now in the oldest place of worship in La Neuveville.

There, over 1000 years ago, in the pre-Carolingian era (8th century probably) the first church building was established on this site.

It was small, because the city did not exist. This is not the remainder from the 13th and especially 14th century when it was enlarged several times, as the population increased, and reaching its greatest extent in the 15th century.

After the Reformation, and especially from the late 17th century, the importance of the White Church declined in favor of the Ste-Catherine chapel (the Temple of 1720) located inside the enclosure. Its maintenance was neglected and the building deteriorated, to the point of being considered for demolition in the 19th century.

Fortunately this fatal project did not materialize and the White Church was the subject of several restorations during the 19th and 20th centuries, the last being that of 1984 to 1988.

The archaeological survey conducted at that time established that the site on which the white church stands was already occupied 4000 years ago, in the Bronze Age (2000 BC.). But it was not then a church.

Description

The nave - Small in size at the beginning, it was enlarged several times to reach its present size.

It is not the center of the church as the chapel and the north side, in very poor condition, were demolished and the wall was rebuilt three meters further south, causing a certain asymmetry of the choir. The south gate was pierced in the 15th century.

The pulpit, of 1536, carries on the left panel the arms of the lord of Ligerz (Gléresse), Vincent, and his wife Helen of Luternauer.

The baptismal font that had been transformed into the communion table and transported to the choir during the Reformation, have been restored to their place and function early in 1988.

The ceiling - originally Gothic (1345) and later flat (1837); the current arched ceiling dates from 1914. The chandeliers, carved and donated by the father of Dr. Edward Louis, were installed in 1914.

Chapels - The chapels were built in the north and south of the nave in the expansion of 1458. The northern, derelict, was demolished in the 19th century.

The choir - Built just before the millennium, the first choir was rebuilt several times after that, around 1200, then in the 16th century, finally in 1912.

The tower - It was built around 1200, north of the choir (enlarged, while remaining smaller in size than the present choir). Its structure, in disrepair, was rebuilt in the 17th century and its tip was renovated in 1708. Thirteen years later, the lower floor was transformed to serve as a powder keg.

The frescoes - They were made in the second half of the 14th and early 15th century.

Formerly, the main decoration was intended to instruct the people. For illiterate people sculptures, paintings and stained glass were a kind of Bible in pictures. In addition, with the representation of certain scenes like the Last Judgement, we wanted to warn the faithful who misbehaved.

Everyone knows the expression "Painting the devil on the wall." What does it represent?

Frescoes in the nave (wall) of the 14th century

(10) Three scenes from the Old Testament concerning the Creation:

- * To right. God speaks to Adam and Eve
- * At center: "creation" of Eve
- * Near the pillar: indistinct scene

(20) The Adoration of the Magi:

- * To right, the Magi head to Bethlehem, every king has a flag #1
- * Left, Joseph, Mary and Child in the stable.

#1 in this regard, it should be noted that the canonical Gospels do not indicate the name of the Magi, nor their number. Traditionally, it varies from 3 to 7. At the White Church we see 5.

Frescoes of the choir: of the 15th century, the wall is:

- * To right. The Virgin before a prie-dieu, with an open Gospel;
- * At left, on the banner: "Ave Maria gratia plena"

* Above the window: the head of Christ rises from the Shroud of St. Veronica

panels on the roof: the four evangelists:

* East: St-Jean winged (blue dress, red tunic); before him, the Gospel is open, on which an eagle is ready to fly away; on the wings of St-Jean, peacock feathers; at his side two angels.

* South: St. Mark sitting with a lion and two musician angels (one yellow, one red)

* West: St-Luc with a winged bull and an angel. Close to the bull, we read: "Sanctus Lucas Evangelist"

* North: St. Matthew, with wings.

* Centerpiece: a rose with six petals, a symbol of Mary.

The organ - To replace the instrument of 1965, a new French organ, of 16 pipes, was built by the Manufactory of Saint-Martin (MM Aeschlimann and Jeanneret) and installed in early 1988.

Furniture - The communion table, lectern, wedding chairs and officiant chair are by Armand Louis of La Neuveville;

the cross and candlesticks are works of Annemarie Maillat, ceramic artist of Neuveville;

liturgical carpets were woven by the students of the School of Curative Education of Biel.

Stained Glass - The window of the chancel, the gift of Professor Kocher, of Berne, and his wife (1907), represents the arms #2 of a city; beneath it says: "The Wort bleibet in Ewigkeit Herren," which means "The Word of God is eternal. "

The small window of the east wall of the nave (1920) is the work of the Valais artist Bille: we recognize a figure holding a palm in his right hand.

Those of the north windows (1936), by the same artist, represent the parable of the sower (first window) and the Prodigal Son (second window).

#2 in 1907, the three hills were still green for the city, now they are "sand", that is to say black

The porch - the porch protecting the western entrance, of Gothic Revival style, was built in 1837.

Chronology

2000 BC Foundations for a dwelling (Bronze Age)

300 BC Housing timber (Iron Age)

Roman era Pavement

8th century pre-Carolingian chapel

March 19, 866 first mention of a church in La Neuveville (Charter of Lothair II) belonging, with its dependencies, to Moutier-Grandval abbey

September 29, 884 Charter of Charles the Fat

March 9, 962 Charter of Conrad the Pacific, King of Transjurane Burgundy

just before the millennium first choir was built

1141 The White Church and its dependencies passed to Bellelay abbey

about 1200 Building the tower

1345 The church, largely rebuilt, is dedicated under the name of "Ecclesia Alba", "White Church"

1458 The church reaches approximately its current size. La Neuveville going into the Reformation. The frescoes were covered with whitewash. The White Church is gradually abandoned and falling apart

1828 The demolition of the White Church is considered, but denied by one vote

1837 Major Repairs (demolition of the north chapel, rebuilt north wall 3 meters to the south, arched ceiling replaced by a flat ceiling). Construction of the west porch

1912-1914 Restoration (choir rebuilt, restored frescoes, arched ceiling, chandeliers)

1920-1936 Installation of windows

1965 Installation of an organ

1984-1988 New restoration and archaeological excavations. New organ. Spoken of at this time of the "Chapel of St. Ursanne" (capella Sancti Ursicini) and not "White Church".