

ATLAS OF
**ABANDONED
FRANCE**



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Contents

A Civil War Farm Castle • Hauts-de-France.....	7
The May Swimming Pool • Hauts-de-France.....	11
The Sthrau Hall • Hauts-de-France.....	13
A Craftsman's Workshop • Hauts-de-France.....	17
The Courthouse in 'Remi, Nobody's Boy' • Hauts-de-France.....	21
A Sock Factory • Grand-Est.....	25
Crypt • Grand-Est.....	27
Top Gun • Grand-Est.....	31
Sleeping Church • Grand-Est.....	35
Gandrange Steel Mill • Grand-Est.....	39
Uckange Blast Furnaces • Grand-Est.....	43
Pottery S • Grand-Est.....	47
Rodolphe Mines • Grand-Est.....	51
The Pram Garage • Bourgogne-Franche Comté.....	55
The Theatre of Dole • Bourgogne-Franche Comté.....	59
Disused Church • Bourgogne-Franche Comté.....	63
Castle of Dukes • Bourgogne-Franche Comté.....	69
Church with Statues • Bourgogne-Franche Comté.....	73
Castle of Kings • Île-de-France.....	77
Bibliopolis • Île-de-France.....	83

A Flourishing Castle • Île-de-France.....	87
A Pastel Prison • Île-de-France.....	93
Saint-Martin Metro Station • Île-de-France.....	97
The Supersonic Concorde - Test Machine • Île-de-France.....	99
A Hovertrain 'Made in France' • Île-de-France.....	103
Sleeping Trains • Normandie.....	109
The Barracks of Sainte-Barbe • Normandie.....	113
Diamond Palace • Normandie.....	115
Marine Graveyard • Bretagne.....	117
The Jumanji Castle • Centre-Val de Loire.....	119
Navy Hospital • Nouvelle-Aquitaine.....	123
Church with the Pastel Choir • Nouvelle-Aquitaine.....	127
Chapel Beneath the Moss • Nouvelle-Aquitaine.....	131
The Knight's Castle • Occitania.....	135
Sailors' Chapel • Occitania.....	139
The La Verrière Orphanage • Occitania.....	143
The Amphitheatre of the Purgatory • Occitania.....	147
Saint-Bernard Barracks • Occitania.....	149
Cloisters • Occitania.....	153



The Sthrau Hall • Hauts-de-France

This exceptional Art Deco jewel well before deserved the renovation it finally got. Even before that, it was amazing to be able to look at this high room topped with a barrel vault and a large elliptical glass dome. The back wall, with its semi-dome, is the apse of the original chapel. Its frescoes, which follow the curves of the walls and ceilings, tell the story of the city's most important moments. The eventful history of the chapel of the Jesuit College spans from 1624, when the first stones were laid, to the present day. The master builder was the Belgian Jesuit friar Jean du Blocq. Later, the Maubeuge Art Deco architects Henri and Jean Laffite extended the building by one floor and added a grandiose hallway. This jewel of a building is exceptional because of its quality and rarity. It has two rooms: one dedicated to music on the ground floor and a ballroom on the first floor, accessed by a monumental staircase that crosses and uncrosses its flights of stairs.

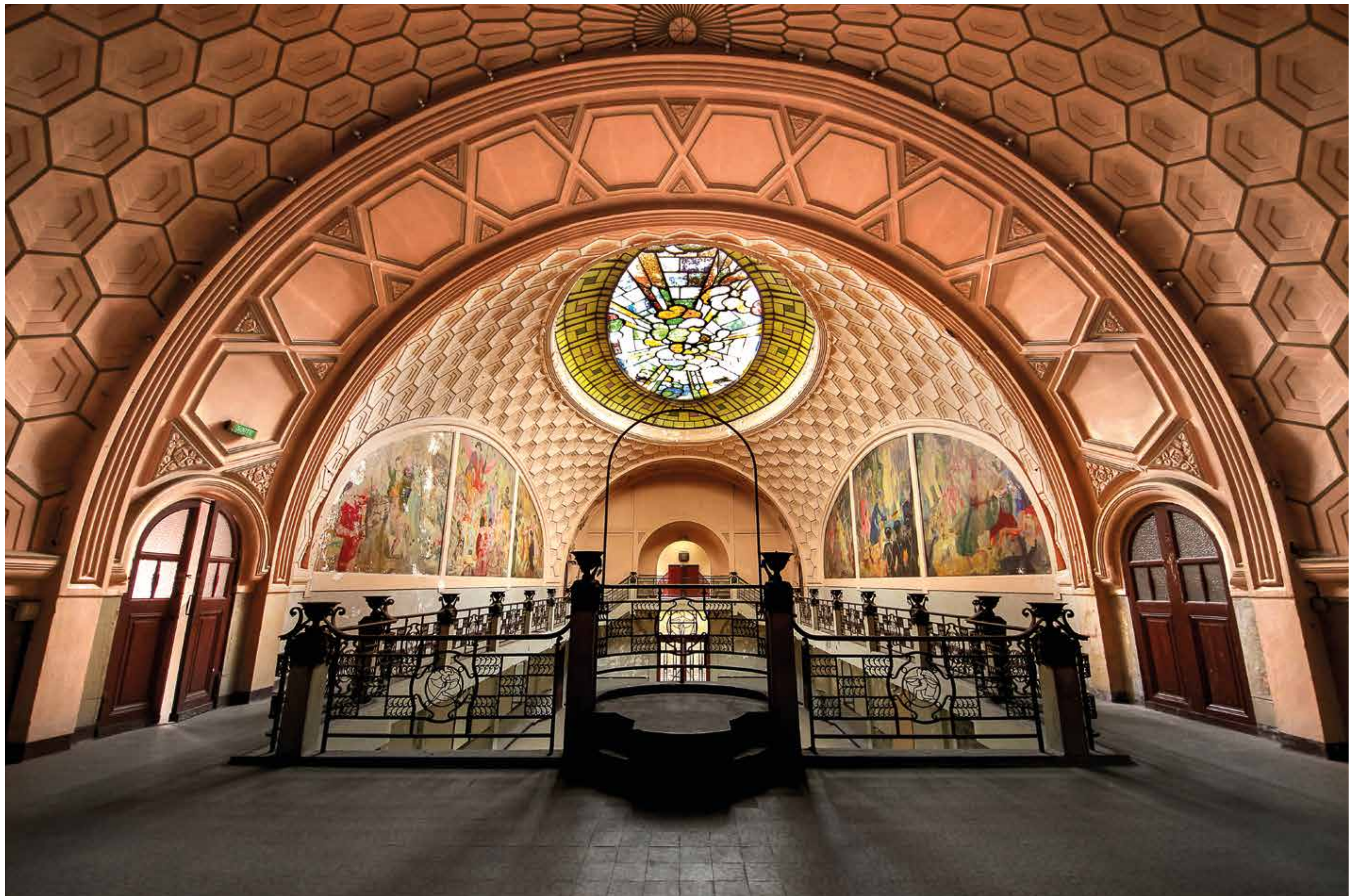
One of the frescoes shows the time when the city of Maubeuge became French again after the second Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle was signed in October 1748, and a bonfire was held during the night to celebrate this occasion. Another fresco is entitled 'The Mabuse Party', in honour of the local painter Jean Gossaert.

The chapel was desecrated and converted into a communal building during the French Revolution before it was used as a garrison stable, shop, barracks and museum. It was renamed *Salle Sthrau* in honour of the little drummer, hero of the nearby battle of Wattignies, and even hosted a grand ball in 1833 in honour of King Louis Philippe. During the Second World War, the stained-glass windows were painted so the light would not betray the presence of people in the building, which miraculously escaped destruction.

The Sthrau Hall has been classified as a historic monument since 2002. In 2017, the municipality of Maubeuge and the French Heritage Foundation joined forces to raise money for the restoration of the building. The renovation was completed at the end of 2018, and the Salle Sthrau is now a cultural space open for exhibitions, artistic activities, and regular concerts.

This is an exceptional building that deserved an exceptional restoration.







Crypt • Grand-Est

Once here, it's impossible to miss the imposing building perched on top of the hill. In the church, the access to the crypt is obstructed by heavy wooden trap door with a thick padlock, atop of which sits a rather imposing trunk. But there is also a half-buried railing. Again, ensnared in a chain and a huge padlock . . . Sometimes luck smiles on you: either it is a decoy, or someone has forgotten to secure the padlock to the chain. A narrow staircase leads underground. Despite the lack of light, one can immediately see that this is a place of interest. A forest of sturdy columns with richly sculpted capitals reveals the presence of three chapels barely lit by thin gloomy openings. It is cool; the atmosphere is humid. Verdigris has worked its way from stone to stone, relentlessly covering the walls with an emerald coating. The eyes slowly become accustomed to the darkness, enough to notice that the sandy floor has carefully been raked like a Japanese garden. Footsteps indicate that others have made their way among these columns. Standing still, it's time to admire the scene, enjoying this perfect quiet moment, before heading back on the way.







Castle of Dukes • Bourgogne-Franche-Comté

The castle the Dukes of Burgundy owned on the hill overlooking a village was a real gem. It is easy to understand why it and its outbuildings are classified as historic monuments.

Built between 1655 and 1700, this manor house consists of a main building built on foundations and square towers flanking each end of its façade. In one of these towers is a stone staircase, unique in France. There are still traces of a drawbridge in the forecourt, where a carriage gate is fitted. The main courtyard is superbly brought to light by a long wall supporting a balustraded terrace. As for the interior, it has been stripped of furniture, but visitors will be surprised to discover exceptional wooden staircases, a Neo-Gothic style dining room, a Moorish bathroom, remarkable stainedglass windows in a gallery and a reception room, and lounges with views opening onto the valley. The whole castle is decorated with tapestries featuring fleur-de-lys and a floor tiled with coloured mosaics using the tesserae method.

The residence was refurbished in the 19th century and is a pure marvel. Taking a walk in the 15-hectare French-style park will let you admire the three-niche dovecote, the former chapel, both covered with lava cladding, and a 17th century pavilion.

The castle was bought by a local resident who fell in love with it. There is a hope that it will regain its former glory.







The Supersonic Concorde – Test Machine · Île-de-France

This is the cockpit of one of the two Franco-British supersonic Concorde airliners to have been produced: the 102. Designed jointly by Sud-Aviation (now Aérospatiale) and the British Aircraft Corporation (now British Aerospace), it was equipped with wings known as 'gothic delta' and a turbojet engine with afterburner. The Concorde made its maiden flight on 10 January 1973. Its cruising speed of Mach 2.02 (about 2,145 km/h) defies belief.

There are only 20 of these aircraft in existence. Six were used for development and 14 for commercial flights. There were two prototypes (001 and 002), two pre-production aircraft (101 and 102) and 16 production aircraft (201 to 216), of which 14 made intercontinental commercial flights and were still in service in April 2003.

The Concorde 102 F-WTSA had the shortest active life, just three years, but it participated in numerous demonstrations to promote supersonic passenger flights. It featured a new tail geometry and vertical tailplane, and a new secondary nozzle design, with increased length and span. From 1973 to 1975, it made 311 flights, totalling 642 hours and 28 minutes, of which 280 hours and 19 minutes were supersonic. It proved very useful throughout the programme.

Commercial flights began in 1976 and ended 27 years later in 2003. High fuel consumption made the Concorde unprofitable. Its decline was hastened by the only accident in its history, in July 2000 on Air France Flight 4590, which killed 113 people after a piece of metal on the runway collided with one of its fuel tanks. Despite this incident, the Concorde remains a wonderful machine.







The Barracks of Sainte-Barbe • Normandy

This warehouse, which seems to have been abandoned since 1994, is home to a dazzling and exceptional collection of fire engines, which were used by the brave firemen and are still in excellent condition today.

Dating from the 1930s to the 1970s, they include mostly French trucks such as Saviem (1955–1978), which was a merger of Latil (the heavyweight vehicle division of Renault) and Somua, but also Citroën, Berliet, Peugeot and Delahaye.

The diversity of shapes makes these truck models unique. The equipment of the trucks differed greatly and depended on the type of emergency they had to attend to, whether the emergency was for an illness, burns, wounds, road accidents, sports accidents, at home or at work. Each truck was equipped with specific features that impacted its appearance, setting them apart from the traditional rescue vehicles with their large ladders well known to the general public.

The only thing that unites them is the typical red colour that all trucks have shared since the 19th century. At that time, the Paris fire brigade imported vermilion fire pumps from England. It was noticed that the colour was more eye-catching and had a greater effect on the population, so the French fire brigade decided to keep it for their own vehicles.

The collection is now being restored before being put on display in a museum and given a new lease of life.

This is a very welcome project, especially as some models have become particularly rare.





The Jumanji Castle • Centre-Val de Loire

As early as the Renaissance, princes and lords had hunting lodges built on their forest estates to practise this leisure activity, which was an extremely popular way of life.

Though rustic in appearance, this beautiful secondary residence has all the comforts and decor worthy of the rank of the personalities of the time and was built by renowned architects attached to the court. The hall, decorated with hunting trophies, opens onto a sensational staircase that celebrates creativity, architecture and beauty in a style steeped in history. Hunters used to gather to feast with friends in this dining room that offers a warm, country atmosphere.





Navy Hospital • Nouvelle-Aquitaine

In 1666, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, controller-general of finance and secretary of state for the French navy under King Louis XIV, chose the port of Rochefort to install a military arsenal for the navy. The city is both open to the Atlantic and protected by the neighbouring islands of Aix, Ré and Oléron. The rapid development of the arsenal, and the regular disembarkation of war wounded, led to the neighbouring commune of Tonnay-Charente's hospital being transferred there. When this became too overcrowded, the hospital was forced to move again. Pierre Toufaire, chief engineer of the navy's civilian buildings, was in charge of the project. The fire of 1772, which destroyed a large part of the Hôtel-Dieu district of Paris, drove him to seek a location beyond the city walls.

Toufaire opted for the nearby headland known as 'la Butte'.

The Hôpital de la Marine was opened in 1788 after five years of building work. It had a capacity of 800 beds but could accommodate up to 1,200 if necessary. It was reserved for military personnel, sailors and shipyard workers. Structurally, the building was inspired by the bungalow-style architecture of the British Royal Naval Hospital at Stonehouse, Plymouth.





The H-shaped construction, which connects a main body with four wings designed to group patients according to their condition, was in use until the early 20th century. Wide openings in the frontages allowed fresh air and sunlight to penetrate and purify the atmosphere.

A round chapel with an octagonal dome overlooks the central entrance hall. The more mobile patients could celebrate Mass from a gallery on the second floor. Four other pavilions in the lateral wings, isolated from the rest, were reserved for contagious cases.

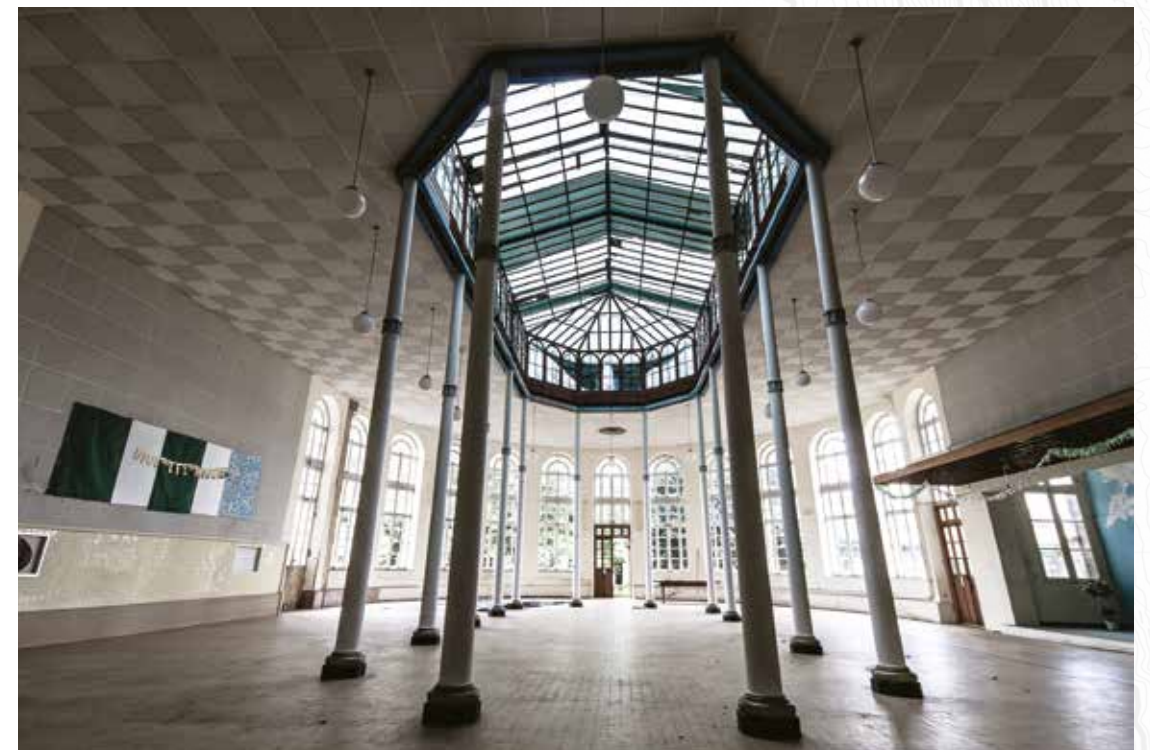
The world's first naval school of medicine, opened in 1722 in Rochefort, was later housed in one of these pavilions. At first it specialised in anatomy and surgery, but in 1890 it was turned into a medical college, a role that lasted until it closed down in 1964. The students had access to a vast library and a botanical garden planted in the 13,000 square metres of tree-lined courtyard surrounding the buildings.

Two other chapels, together with technical and administrative services, completed the property. Wells were bored on site, as the city depended on them for its supply of drinking water. Although no fresh water was found, the boreholes did reveal a thermal spring which is still flowing today.

A civilian hospital was built next door during the 19th century. The military hospital was in use until 1983; in 1965, its entrance and the main chapel, façades, pavilions and various other features were awarded protection under the historical monuments designation.

In 1989, a real-estate company acquired the property but left it standing empty except for the school, which was converted into a national museum for the former naval school of medicine, and another pavilion that was used for accommodation.

The following decade saw several rehabilitation proposals, but they all came to nothing. After endless complications, the city administration took over in 2015. Restoration is now on the cards, while preserving the historic character of the site.





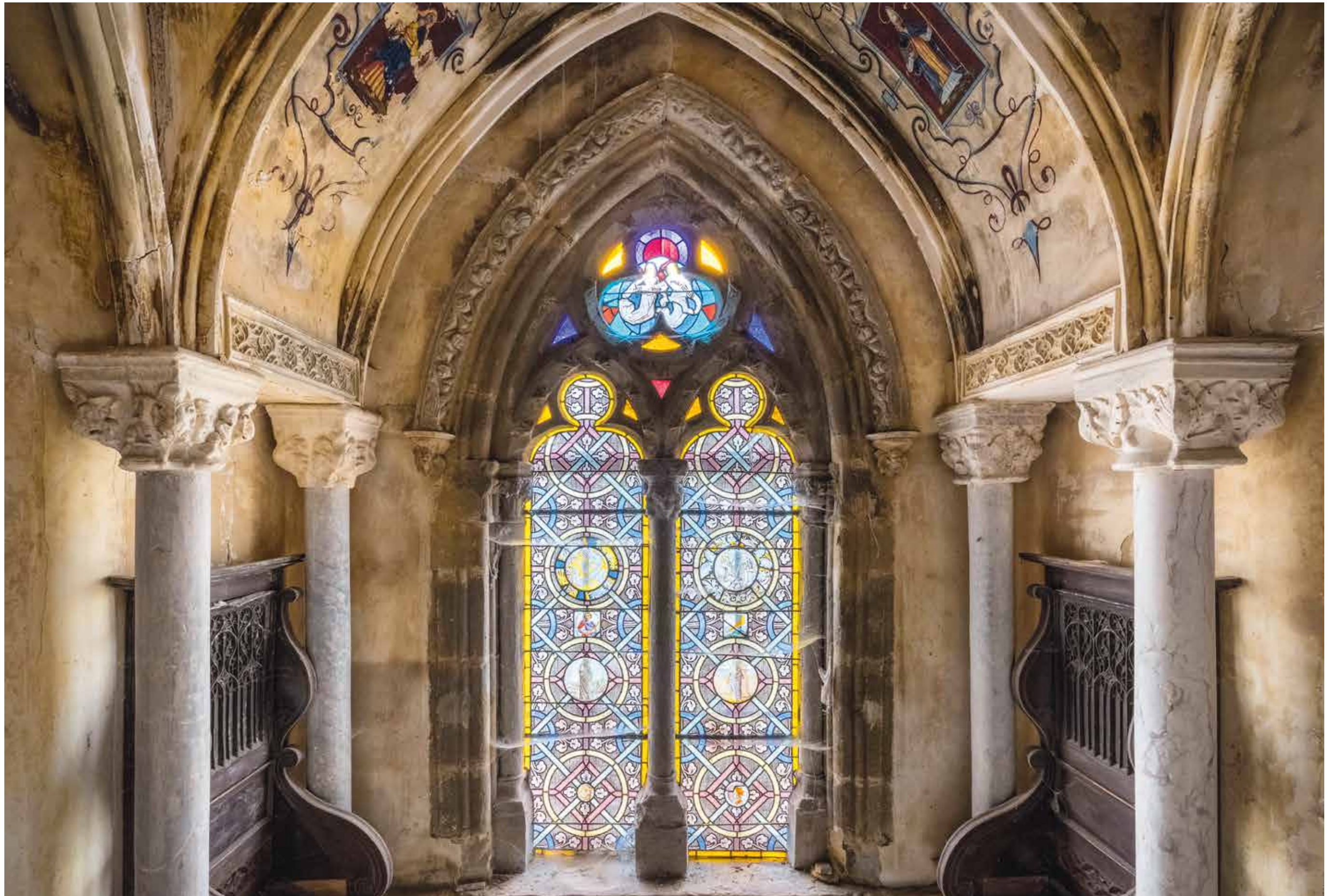
Cloisters • Occitania

A cloister. The background of an ageing forest. The tiles are neatly arranged, supporting beams, the cross has been picked up, wild grass grows in the garden. Every place is the place of a projection, in an image, an infinity of images, including this one: a candid place without ringing bells or silent prayers, where possibility and impatience, desire and tenderness, birth and end, resurface. Nothing is more precious than this moment, this image and the dream that it begins again. To hell with ulterior motives, petty strategy. To hell with the pure and the impure! Do not lose your only chance. Enter this room under the sky with consciousness in the place that says yes, yes to the other, yes to love.

‘One moment to dawdle, a lifetime to regret!’ (Jankelevich). What would these charming stones and greenery be without your breath, without your lovers’ eyes, without your hands and mouths looking for each other?

This is a place of pleasure, of miraculous simultaneity, and of lucky reciprocity between body and soul. Your silhouettes against a column, lying in the aisle, mingled and united. So many times! Your wonderful youth!





ATLAS OF ABANDONED FRANCE

An abandoned Paris metro station, fire stations where tankers from the last century wait in vain for the next alert, a prison with faded pastel walls, cloisters overgrown with vegetation, a mansion where dust covers the keys of a mute piano, fighter planes asleep on the runway of an airfield, a crypt plunged into eternal silence...

The extraordinary wealth of France's heritage, which can easily be admired in museums and other prestigious monuments, is not limited to these national treasures. Across the country, many witnesses to a bygone era are falling into oblivion, taking with them the vestiges of a past that is just as fascinating as the one carefully safeguarded behind glass. That's what this superb photographic report is all about: beauty and grandeur never disappear.



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