

## 11 - The abbey church

A fine example of primitive Gothic architecture, the abbey church was mostly built over a period of 150 years starting in the second half of the twelfth century.

In 1810 an imperial decree ordered its sale and it was subsequently dismantled for its stone. The facade and part of the nave were destroyed. Two columns from the chancel were also removed. Thereafter the church deteriorated and the chancel was close to crumbling until, in 1860, the bishop of Coutances, Mgr. Bravard, had two crude stone pillars built.

Facing east, the church was built in the traditional form of a Latin cross.

### • The chancel

The chancel was built in a simple but elegant style. It has two bays and a semicircular apse. Five radiating chapels dating from the late twelfth century open on to the ambulatory.

The edifice comprises three levels: the great arcades, the intermediate level with small windows, and the high windows.

The capitals of the high columns are decorated with finely sculpted crockets and leaves.

Major restoration works to the chancel were carried out in 2009-2010.

Only the monks could enter the chancel to celebrate the eight daily offices.

### • The transept

On the north side stands Saint-Michael's Chapel. It has a ribbed vaulted ceiling and is surmounted by a gallery that would have been reserved for the local lord. At the entrance there is a fifteenth century capital historiated with a hunting scene.

In the right arm are two bricked up doors: one led to the sacristy and the other to the monks' dormitory.

Above the transept crossing, the square tower rises to a height of thirty metres and once contained the bells.

### • The nave

The nave was reserved for the lay brothers. Completed in the early fourteenth century, it was one of the last parts of the church to be erected. Not only narrow, it was originally longer but part of the first bay and the facade were destroyed in 1820.

In 2011 the foundations of the facade were uncovered during archaeological excavations.

### Elisabeth Beck: this is the work of a lifetime

For over a century and a half, architects, politicians and institutions endeavoured to save the deteriorating abbey but their efforts came to nothing. This situation changed, however, when the Beck family bought the site in 1956. At that time the monastic buildings were in a desperate state and, initially, Mrs Elisabeth Beck took very little interest in them. She became aware of the value of the ruined abbey following the visit of a heritage association called Les Vieilles Maisons Françaises. From that moment on, she worked tirelessly to restore the site and opened it to the public. After the death of her husband in 1969, she moved into the abbey and continued the task alone.

Immersed in the building works, guided tours and paperwork, she devoted her entire life to restore, with sobriety and simplicity, this ancient monastery to which her name shall forever be attached. She died on 18 August 2010 at the age of 88.

## HAMBYE 3D

The product of a collaboration between archaeologists, historians and digital designers, the HAMBYE 3D project offers a virtual-reality reconstruction of the medieval abbey.

3 different views can be explored as part of the exhibit.

- Take the tablet out of the terminal and press the red button.
- Wait for the program to load.
- View the reconstruction by turning around 90°.
- Once you are done viewing, you can select one of the following options by touching the screen:
  - **re-watch the animation** or **learn more**. View points of interest by moving the tablet.
- Press the red button before placing the tablet back on its base.

*Please report any difficulties or technical issues to reception.*

## SERVICES

- Guided tours every day (approx. 1 hour, see Reception for details).
- Shop specializing in the history of architecture, religious buildings, the Middle Ages, and local products.
- Education packs available for teachers.
- Programme of cultural events throughout the season (see Reception for details).
- Interpreted footpaths in the valleys of La Doquette and La Sienne.

Hambye Abbey belongs to the network of sites and museums run by Manche Council.

The monastic buildings are private.



### Abbaye de Hambye

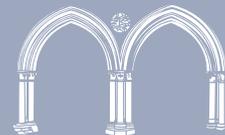
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 Patrimoine et musées de la Manche

[patrimoine.manche.fr](http://patrimoine.manche.fr)

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# Hambye

## abbey

The charms  
of a well-preserved medieval site

## A history of the abbey...

Our Lady of Hambye Abbey was founded in 1145 by Guillaume Painel, lord of Hambye. The first monks were Benedictines from Tiron Abbey, in the Perche, who were much inspired by Cistercian rigour.

The abbey prospered from the start and in 1181 became the head of an order that comprised abbeys near Bayeux (Longues) and Fécamp (Valmont), one in Brittany and three others in England. Prosperity reached a peak in the thirteenth century and thereafter the abbey slid slowly into decline. The last of the monks left the monastery several years before the French revolution.

Now owned by the state, the abbey was put up for sale, the monastic buildings were adapted for agricultural purposes and, from 1810 onwards, the church was exploited for its stone and the cloister dismantled. In 1902 the abbey church was listed as an ancient monument to ensure its future as a heritage site and to safeguard the charm and atmosphere of its medieval ruins. The remainder of the abbey was listed in 1925.

Dr Beck and his wife bought the monastic buildings in 1956 and these remain in the family's hands today. In 1964 Manche Council acquired the ruins of the church, the gatehouse and the lay brothers' dwelling.

Since then, a public-private partnership has undertaken considerable works to restore and stabilize the remains of the abbey. For more than fifty years the goal has been to preserve the dignity and beauty of the site and to improve its integration into the peace and serenity of its fragile natural surroundings (also a protected site).

## Visitor guide

[patrimoine.manche.fr](http://patrimoine.manche.fr)

LA MANCHE  
LE DÉPARTEMENT



## DISCOVERING THE SITE

This booklet describes the abbey, the grounds and the monastic buildings. Please note the latter are private and lived in. Please respect the site.

### 1 - The gatehouse

This is the main entrance to the monastery. It has a double gate which is surmounted by the much-worn crest of the Painel family. The vousoirs of the round arches are decorated with rows of bead and chevron moldings.

The porter's cell, a small barrel-vaulted room, has survived.

The floor above contains the auditorium where the abbot dispensed justice. Today this room houses the exhibition **Les Toiles de Hambye, local popular art from the nineteenth century.**

### 2 - The outer court <sup>3D</sup>

Situated to the west of the monastery proper, this space was an area of transition between the outside world and the buildings reserved for the monks.

It was also an area where people, mostly lay brothers, worked.

### 3 - The lay brothers' house

Lay brothers were not monks. They took religious vows but their duties were, for the most part, limited to manual work and farming.

It was built parallel to the monks' lodgings and, some time after the sixteenth century, was converted into a dwelling for the commendatory abbot.

Its facade has been considerably modified but retains a beautiful romanesque doorway (with a double archivolt) which opened on to a corridor leading to the cloister.

The room on the ground floor, which is today used for temporary exhibitions, was originally the lay brothers' refectory.

The lay brothers slept in a dormitory on the first floor (please use the outdoor staircase) and could walk to the church along a narrow path that lay between it and the wall of the cloister. The small room, which was once the cell of the head lay brother, contains a fireplace with plaster mouldings dating from the seventeenth century. The barrel-vaulted timber ceiling in the second room has been restored. Today these two rooms house the permanent exhibition, **Hambye abbey Tales**, in which you'll discover eight centuries of the abbey's history. <sup>3D</sup>

### 4 - The monks' courtyard

As with most Benedictine abbeys, the monastery comprised two parallel buildings that backed on to the church and a third that stood perpendicular to the other two. They enclosed the cloister.

The west wing housed the lay brothers and the kitchen.

The east wing, an extension of the south transept of the church, was reserved for the monks. The ground floor contained various rooms used for domestic and religious purposes and the first floor comprised the monks' dormitory.

The monks' refectory (**R**), which no longer exists, enclosed the south side of the cloister. It was partly dismantled in the seventeenth century and the remainder was removed in the nineteenth century, as were the cellars underneath it.

The farm buildings (**FB**) at the south end of the courtyard included a pigsty, a pressing shed, a cart-house and some stables.

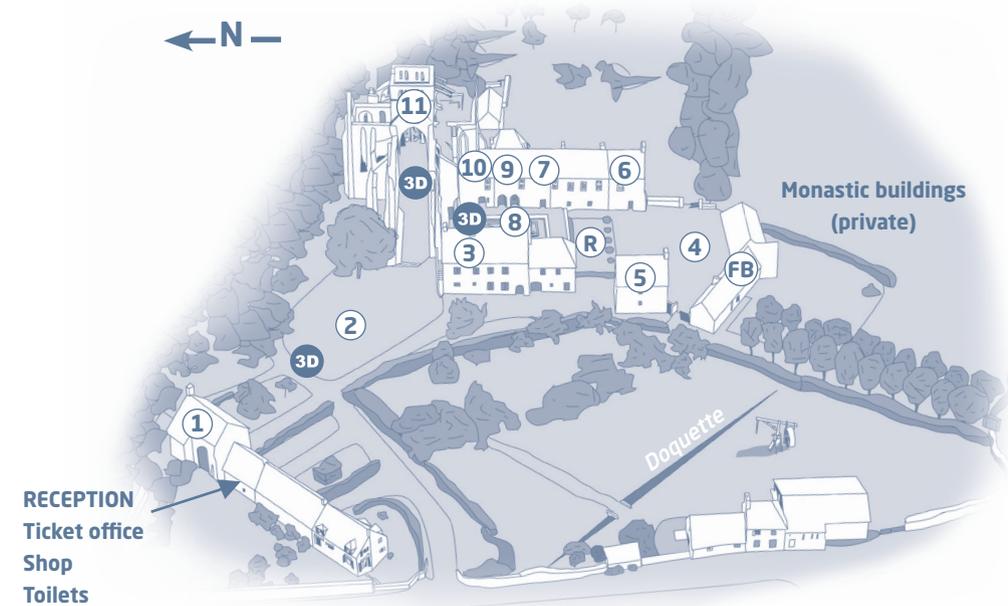
A gate stood between the kitchen and the stables to prevent laymen from entering the monks' courtyard.

### 5 - The kitchen

Cooking was done by the monks and the lay brothers. They worked to a weekly rota.

The fireplace is the most important feature in the kitchen and occupies an entire wall. Nearly thirteen feet wide, its lintel is a segmental arch comprising two rows of vousoirs, one above the other. The lower row is assembled with crossettes and scarfs joints.

A rudimentary gutter stone was built into the wall (on the courtyard side) and served as a drain for waste water. Converted after the Revolution into outbuildings and a stable for horses, the kitchen was restored in the 1960s.



### 6 - The monk's day room

Dating from the twelfth century, it has two aisles and a groin vault. Originally this room was longer, extending one more bay to the south. A cylindrical pillar has been removed when the room was shortened and replaced by the fireplace. The monks came to this room to warm up during the coldest hours of the winter. Similar to those of many abbeys, the heated common room doubled as the scriptorium, a room where the monks studied and copied manuscripts.

Below the window is a stove built from stone, a reminder that the room was also used as a refectory by the last monks to live in the abbey. The stove was used for cooking stews and keeping food warm. It was originally built at floor level but, because of water seeping into the room, it had to be raised several times.

Major restoration works between 1963 and 1966 returned the room's floor to its original level.

### 7 - The parlour

This small rectangular room has a central pillar and four groined vaults. It was both used as a parlour, the only room where the monks could break the rule of silence, and a mortuary.

The walls and the ceiling are lime-plastered and painted with black fleur-de-lis on one side and reddish-brown flowers with five petals on the other. This decoration dates from the thirteenth century.

The fifteenth century Pietà was made in wood and painted. It comes from a medieval church in Gavray, which no longer exists.

### 8 - The cloister <sup>3D</sup>

In addition to being a place for prayer and meditation, the cloister facilitated communications between the various rooms of the abbey because it occupied the space between the church, the lay brothers' wing, the monks' accommodation and the refectory. It consisted of a garden enclosed by four covered passages. The stone corbels that once bore the beams of roofs can be seen on the walls of the buildings.

The cloister was dismantled in the 1830s and its columns were removed from the site.

In 1989 archaeological excavations on the south and west walkways uncovered some graves and a low foundation wall on which now stand two of the original columns and several replica ones.

The garden opened in 2000 and its design evokes the layout of the walkways and the inner garden.

### 9 - The chapter house

Every morning the monks assembled here to read an extract from the Rule of Saint Benedict and deal with the daily business of the abbey. Once a week an assembly was held there to hear confessions.

With its balanced proportions and elegant sculpted decoration, Hambye Abbey's chapter house is a masterpiece of thirteenth century Norman Gothic architecture.

Two naves separated by a central line of granite columns open on to the walkway of the cloister through two pointed arches with multiple archivolt. Facing east, the chapter house ends in a polygonal apse with large lancet-windows. The apse juts out from the side of the building, which is a particularity of Norman architecture.

The final pillar supports the spring of the apse's arches and composes a fine palm motif.

Arches and ribbed vaults made from Caen limestone spring from small engaged columns whose capitals are finely decorated with leaves and crockets.

Some traces of the painted decor that once adorned each bay of the room remain. The decoration and plasterwork were discovered and restored in the period 1994-2002. On the north wall, the thirteenth century fresco depicting the Washing of the Feet can still be seen.

### 10 - The sacristy

This room communicated directly with the church through a door that is now bricked up. Liturgical objects and vestments were kept there. It is a narrow room with a barrel-vaulted ceiling and renovated painted decors on the walls.