

Henri IV (13 December 1553 – 14 May 1610)

FROM ILE DE LA CITÉ (1ST) TO SAINT LOUIS HOSPITAL (11TH)

In order to conquer his kingdom, Henri IV could not avoid ruin. When he entered Paris on 22 March 1594, he discovered a ruined, insalubrious city with a desperate shortage of water. Construction started again after the Peace of Vervins and the chronicle underlines the fact that as soon as he was master of Paris, “all you could see were masons at work”. The first of the Bourbons would show the full extent of his ambition to be the Builder King. Supported by Jean de Fourcy, the Buildings Superintendent, and Sully, the Head Surveyor of France, Henri IV was the first to have a vision of a city with a regular network, with well-ordered streets, reconciled with a river which Parisians could no longer even see, as the bridges were so covered with houses. The King from the Béarn region, a keen walker, passed on his love of walking to his “good city”, offering Paris as a spectacle: squares and façades of stupefying decorative beauty and also easier trading in a city where social mixing was the rule. Under his reign, Paris began its first major transformation. In October 1608, Malherbe wrote to Peiresc, “if you return to Paris in two years, you will no longer recognise it”. Two years later the King was assassinated, but his work continued. Paris nonetheless remained a semi-rural, Middle-Age city. The historic mansions of the Le Marais district were not representative of Parisian residences of the period. The greatest architects of the period left the traces of a nascent style for us to see.

1

(1st) Square du Vert Galant

Statue of Henri IV

This equestrian statute commissioned by Marie of Medici from Jean de Bologne and completed on his death by his student Pietro Tacca, was loaded onto a ship in Livorno in 1613 and had a difficult journey up the Seine following a shipwreck off the coast of Sardinia. It was inaugurated in the presence of the young Louis XIII on 23 August 1614, although “the colossus of the great King Henri” was not completed until 1618, when four captives sculpted by Bordonni were placed on the corners of the pedestal constructed by Franqueville. On the bas-reliefs, idyllic allegories of the Sovereign show him giving bread to the starving inhabitants. The statue was knocked down in 1792 and François-Frédéric Lemot returned life to the bronze in 1818 thanks to the golden legend of good King Henri. On 3 May 1814, Louis XVIII’s cortege stopped on the Pont Neuf, in front of a plaster cast of his ancestor. On the pedestal could be read “The return of Louis brought Henri back to life”. The first equestrian statue in Paris thus announced the deification of the Sovereign by 17th and 18th century artists.

2

(1st) Place Dauphine

External façades of the Place Dauphine

The Pont Neuf would soon create a new district. In return for his loyal services during the Holy League¹, Achille de Harlay, President à mortier² of the Parliament of Paris, was entrusted with the lands at the western tip and instructed to construct a Place in accordance with the plan imposed by the King and the Head Surveyor Sully. It was to be a walkway surrounded by houses “of the same kind”, comprising two storeys, whose piers³ would be decorated with stone tablets projecting from the brick and whose ground floor arches would house boutiques. Despite its late start, the project was successful; the Place Dauphine, near the Louvre, became a place of change and exchange, attracting goldsmiths, spectacle manufacturers and engravers. In 1607, the King had a road called Rue Dauphine cut on the Left Bank, also in honour of the Dauphin who was born in 1601. The houses, which were well set out around a wide street, thus extended the harmony of the Place.

3

(1st) The Pont Neuf **The Pont Neuf and its grotesque masks⁴**

The Pont Neuf, which was begun under Henri III, was completed in mid-1606, straddling two blocks which had been joined together to facilitate its construction. This “bridge-promenade”, free of houses and in the centre of a new and fashionable district, was a real attraction from the time of the Ancien Régime until the Revolution.

The daily fruit and vegetable market, the trinket-sellers, the book stalls and monkey leaders made this passage an important location resonating with processions and practical jokes⁵. At the end of the 18th century, Soufflot installed stone-built boutiques in the semi-circles to offset the impoverished air of a bridge already taken over by the stalls set up along the length of its parapets. And when a support ended up breaking, considerable work had to be carried out for several years, starting in 1885. The mills secured at each basket-handle arch were removed. As regards the splendid, ruined grotesque masks by Germain Pilon, they were replaced by copies. Some of the originals can be admired at the Carnavalet Museum.

4

(1st) Quai François Mitterand

The Louvre: the Gallery next to the Water

The Louvre was the starting point for the major urban development work of a King who intended to live in his Parisian residence. Continuing the work of his predecessors, he carried out a “Great plan”, completing the Charles IX wing of the Square Courtyard, four times larger than the surface area of the former medieval castle. The “gallery next to the water”, 450 metres long, was his greatest achievement. Constructed by Louis Métezeau and Jacques II Androuet du Cerceau, it formed a junction with the Tuileries Palace, built at the request of Catherine of Medici. Despite later modifications, the gallery still contains several monograms of the first Bourbon King which it is fun to track down between the hatches and the small gallery. The “H” of Henri IV can be found several times together with the “G” of Gabrielle d’Estrées, with which it is closely intertwined around the torch of the marriage planned by the King before the sudden death of his favourite mistress.

5

(1st) Corner of Rue Saint Honoré and Rue de l’Arbre Sec

Croix-du-Trahoir Fountain

A few minutes before he was mortally wounded, Henri IV and his open coach passed in front of the Croix-du-Trahoir, where a gallows stood for a long time, giving the Rue de l’Arbre Sec (Street of the Dry Tree) its sinister name. As regards the fountain, this was commissioned by François I from Jean Goujon in 1529. Henri IV and the provost of merchants, François Miron, renovated it in 1606. It was also moved a few metres in 1636 in order to improve the movement of traffic in Rue Saint-Honoré. It was rebuilt by Soufflot during the reign of Louis XVI and decorated with stalactites created by the sculptor Boizot, who also sculpted the nymph which can be seen on Rue Saint Honoré, a reproduction of the one by Jean Goujon on the original fountain. A crown, three fleur de lis, a Latin inscription and a grotesque mask can be found on the side facing the Rue de l’Arbre Sec.

6

(1st) 8, Rue de la Ferronnerie

The assassination of Henri IV

It was due to a forced stop in front of what is now 8, Rue de la Ferronnerie, barely four metres wide and reduced even further by the stalls set up along the enclosure wall of the Innocents cemetery, that Ravailac, following the King’s open coach on foot, took the opportunity to strike the converted Huguenot. In 1669, one of the first rental properties in Paris, 120 metres long, was constructed in the same place. In 1786, two arches were cut in the middle of the building, allowing people to pass between Rue de la Ferronnerie and the vegetable market set up on the site of the former Innocents cemetery. This building has hardly changed since the 17th century, except for the extremities which were given new façades when the cemetery’s mass graves disappeared.

7

(3rd) 8, Rue Elzevir

Inner courtyard of the Hôtel Donon (Donon Mansion), Cognacq-Jay Museum

Constructed in 1575 by Médéric de Donon, the King's Controller General of Buildings, the Donon Mansion illustrates the inventiveness of architecture in the time of Henri IV. Around a rectangular courtyard, a main body of dwellings rises above two storeys of cellars reserved for the kitchens. The two upper storeys are identical, topped with another square floor with a roof trussing on top giving a pyramid effect. The naked consoles emphasise the mouldings and the roundness of the skylights in this building made elegant by its sobriety. The mansion's garden, accessible via Rue Payenne, continues the tradition of French-style gardens. The Hôtel Denon, spoiled by sloping roofs⁶, was restored by the City of Paris, which acquired it in 1974. It was classified as a Historic Monument and currently houses the collections of the [Musée Cognacq-Jay](#).

8

(4th) 24, Rue Pavée

Façades of the Court of Honour of the Hôtel de Lamoignon (Lamoignon Mansion)

In 1584, Diane of France, the Duchess of Angoulême, had the Angoulême residence constructed, whose Court of Honour, now listed, revealed the "colossal order" of the architecture of the period. The building's three floors are framed by six pilasters⁷ which extend over the full height of the façade and are topped with Corinthian capitals. The other original features include two west-works on each extremity, with cynegetic allegories on their pediments. These show Diane the Hunter, a stag's head, a crescent, dogs' heads and bows and quivers, evoking the love of hunting of this princess who managed to reconcile King Henri III with her cousin the future King Henri IV. In 1658, Guillaume de Lamoignon, the first President of the Parliament of Paris, occupied the Hôtel and gave it its current name. He is responsible for the portal, installed in 1718 and topped with a circular tympan showing two figures of children, one holding a mirror and the other a serpent, representing Truth and Prudence, symbols dear to this family of magistrates. The Hôtel currently houses the historic library of the City of Paris.

9

(3rd) 23, Rue de Sévigné

The Henri IV Courtyard of the Carnavalet Museum

The Hôtel Carnavalet (Carnavalet Mansion), constructed by Pierre Lescot in a Renaissance style and decorated by the sculptor Jean Goujon, houses a jewel in its Court of Honour: the equestrian bronze high-relief of Henri IV, dating from 1834, which replaced the plaster bas-relief which adorned the tympan⁸ of the central door of the City Hall from 1815 and the return of the Bourbons. The effigy, a vestige of the fire in 1871, bears the scars of its attempted destruction, including bullet holes and marks from the iron bars used by the Communards to try and remove the statue from its support. The traces of violence did not alter the majestic face of the sovereign sculpted by Henri Lemaire, which he topped with the laurel leaves of victory.

10

(4th) 1, Place des Vosges

Place des Vosges, the King's Pavilion

Originally planned to house a factory intended to compete with the Milan silk mills – a project which soon fizzled out – in 1605 the Place was transformed into properties for the highest dignitaries of the old nobility and the noblesse de robe. Louis Métezeau and Jacques II Androuet du Cerceau, the two usual architects of Henri IV, designed the pavilions which consisted of four archways on the ground floor, two storeys with four windows each and a large slate roof pierced with attics and bull's eye windows. The pink and white façades mixed with the stone links and entablaments topped with bluish slates are undeniably the original feature of this colourful but often varied architecture. In fact, the polychromy of the Place des Vosges actually reveals rubble stone⁹ constructions covered with a coating which imitates the colour of the brick. Brick on the other hand is plentiful on the King's Pavilion and, opposite it, on the Queen's pavilion, whose two arches are more elevated to allow the coaches coming from the Rue de Birague and the Rue de Béarn opposite it, to pass through.

11

(3rd) Corner of Rue Debelleye and Rue de Poitou

The Place de France project

In 1603, Henri IV wanted to start work on another Place on the arable land of the Temple at the end of the Le Marais district. Sully commissioned the engineers Alleaume and Chastillon to draw up plans for a district which would converge towards the Place de France. It would be a semi-circle whose diameter, marked out on the site of the ramparts, was formed by buildings intended for use as halls, markets and the administrative district. The Place was to be surrounded by a semi-circular street, the starting point for eight streets leading off it which would bear the names of French provinces. Three streets were already aligned by 1610, the Rue de Normandie, the Rue de Bretagne and the Rue de Poitou, as well as two side streets, the Rue Charlot and the Rue de Saintonge. As regards the semicircular side street, this is the current Rue Debelleye, which best evokes the project interrupted by the King's death. Under Louis XIII, the project nonetheless meant that this still marshy district could be drained and extraordinary mansions built, particularly on Rue Pastourelle and Rue Charlot.

12

(11th) Place du Dr Alfred Fournier

St Louis Hospital

An edict of 19 May 1607, following an epidemic of the plague which brought to mind that of 1562 which had killed almost 70,000 people in Paris, proclaimed the construction of St Louis hospital "outside the city". It was built in accordance with the plans of the engineer Claude Chastillon and completed by Claude Vellefaux in 1611. The hospital's layout was inspired by fortified manor houses, but evokes that of the Place des Vosges in its "three chalk" architecture of stone, brick and slate. Around a central quadrilateral decorated with pavilions in the corners is a double enclosure of walls and courtyards. On the eastern esplanade is the chapel, which seems to turn its back on the centre. Henri IV, who laid the first stone in July 1607, had wanted it to be turned over to the parishioners of the surrounding countryside. The stone gallery, which was spared from the Revolution, still bears the splendid monograms of the King and Marie of Medici.

GLOSSARY

- 1. League:** the Holy League, created by Henri de Guise in 1575, was an ultra-Catholic party opposed to the Protestants. It was led by Mayenne and threatened the monarchy until in 1588, when it managed to chase Henri III from the capital. It gradually declined in the face of the victories of King Henri IV.
- 2. President à mortier:** a venal office under the Ancien Régime involving magistrates in the upper courts (parliaments). Their name comes from their high-crowned cap (mortier).
- 3. Pier:** space between two doors or two windows.
- 4. Grottesque mask:** ornamental design consisting of a grotesque, bas-relief figure decorating gateway arches, capitals, entablements and fountain orifices.
- 5. Practical joke:** burlesque farce. From the name of Tabarin, whose real name was Antoine Girard, a tumbler in the time of Henri IV and famous for his harangues, particularly on the Pont Neuf.
- 6. Sloping roofs:** small roof leaning against a wall, whose lower part is generally supported by posts.
- 7. Pilaster:** rectangular projection from a wall generally with a base and a capital in the style of a column.
- 8. Tympan:** in architecture, designates the space between the two cornices of a pediment
- 9. Rubble stone:** building stone normally covered with plaster or mortar. The freestone has distinct edges allowing it to be slotted into other blocks.

