

By Claire Louis

1

Port on the river Senne

Commercial port near the Scipbrug.

This port on the river Senne was probably created some ten years before 1020 (date of the oldest text mentioning it). It was the reason for the development of *Brosela* or *Bruocsela* or *Broekzele*, meaning the 'village of the marsh'. The *Scipbrug* (ship bridge) spanned the river. The Senne is a tributary of the Scheldt, flowing to Antwerp and then on to the North Sea. The port was initially a transit centre for surplus grain from the great agricultural estates nearby, but it then became a hub for more wide-ranging trade. It became even more important when it was directly linked to the Cologne-Bruges trading route in the mid 12th century at the latest.

History At the end of the 16th century the boatmen left the banks of the Senne for the Willebroeck canal that was opened in 1561. The canal enabled larger boats to travel to Antwerp in one or two days, as opposed to eight days to two months on the Senne. The old port was then occupied by the Fish Market until the river was covered over in 1867-1871. This was done to clean up the city and make the centre more attractive, as industrial effluents had made the Senne a virtual open sewer. The area was then home to the Central Halls (a covered market) until they were demolished to make way for a car park for the World Fair of 1958.

● *Today: Port = building known as 'Parking 58' on the rue de la Vierge Noire, including a car park, offices and a supermarket. Scipbrug = corner of rue Marché aux Poulets and rue de la Vierge Noire.*

2

Saint-Géry island

Island formed by the branches of the Senne, with a church dedicated to Saint-Géry in the centre.

The Saint-Géry island (also known as the 'Large island') was formed at the junction of the two main branches of the Senne: the Large Senne that entered the town from the South; and the Small Senne or Ransfort Senne that entered from the West. The island was probably not natural, but was created by hydraulic work undertaken in the 12th century to enable water mills belonging to the Duke of Brabant, Overlord of Brussels, to be installed. It took its name from the church dedicated to Saint-Géry that was probably founded in the 10th century.

History The church of Saint-Géry grew and changed over the centuries, but was destroyed in 1798 during the French rule. All signs of the island disappeared when the Senne was covered over in 1871. Ten years later, the public square used as a market that had taken the place of the church of Saint-Géry, was modified so that the Saint-Géry Halls (a covered market) could be constructed. Since the 1990s the Saint-Géry area has become livelier and is now one of the capital's most animated areas.

● *Today: Area around place Saint-Géry.*

3

The Nedermerct

The most important market square in the lower town. Bordered to the North by the Bread Hall.

This area was originally a marsh. After it had been drained it was occupied by the *Nedermerct* (lower market), the most important of the numerous town markets that developed in the area around the church of St Nicolas (patron saint of shopkeepers). There were a great variety of stalls belonging to traders and craftsmen in the market, whereas in the neighbouring streets specialist markets developed for cheese, fish, poultry, charcoal etc. Wooden and stone houses sprang up around the market square. In the space between the Chaussée and the lower market, the covered markets were occupied by butchers, drapers and bakers.

History Later on this market was commonly known as the Grand-Place. The square became not only the economic heart of the town, but also its political centre. It gradually took on its rectangular shape thanks to interventions by the municipal authorities. In the first half of the 15th century, they built a prestigious town hall. At the same time the Duke of Brabant constructed a building to house the various sections of his administration on the site of the former Bread Hall (bread market). Houses belonging to rich individuals as well as guilds occupied the rest of the square. The Grand-Place was also an ideal location for festivals and official events. The houses of the Grand-Place were rebuilt following the fire caused by the bombardment of 1695 using the same layout but in the style in vogue at the time. All of the buildings on the Grand-Place were renovated in the late 19th century.

● *Today: The Nedermerct = Grand-Place. Bread Hall = Maison du Roi (completely rebuilt between 1875 and 1896).*

4

Franciscan monastery

Monastery founded by the Mendicant Order of Friars Minor.

Around 1238, just a few years after the death of St Francis of Assisi, a community of Friars Minor established itself in the centre of Brussels, on the banks of the Senne near the church of St Nicolas. Outside of the convent, the Franciscan Mendicant Order expanded its social and preaching activities.

History This religious complex expanded over the years (see the model of Brussels in the 17th century). The monastery was dissolved and sold in 1796 due to the secularisation of ecclesiastical goods during the French rule. A butter market was established where the church used to stand and part of the other buildings were reallocated. This all disappeared when the Senne was covered over (1867-1871) and the central boulevards were laid out. The Butter Market then gave way to the Bourse (stock exchange). In 1988 archaeological excavations underneath the rue de la Bourse revealed vestiges of part of the monastery.

● *Today: The Bourse. Vestiges visible at the archaeological site 'Bruxella 1238'. Information: +32 (0)2 279 43 55 - www.brucity.be.*

5

The Chaussée (*Steenweg*)

Stone road linking the lower and upper towns.

The Chaussée was the main route linking the lower town where the ordinary people lived and where trade took place, with the upper town where the central government sat. Leaving the town, it continued to Ghent and Bruges from the lower town and Namur from the upper town. Half-way up the hills it branched into two sections: one going to Cologne via Louvain; the other going to Paris via Mons.

History For centuries, the Chaussée was the major route for traffic, giving the town an East-West structure. In the 19th century, the town changed to a North-South route structure. The old Chaussée disappeared completely in the 20th century when the Montagne de la Cour area was developed into the Mont des Arts.

● *Today: Going from the upper town to the lower town, you can find the route of the former Chaussée along the following roads: rue de Namur / Montagne de la Cour / de la Madeleine / Marché aux Herbes / Marché aux Poulets / Sainte-Catherine / de Flandre.*

6

Coudenberg castle

Fortress serving as the residence for the Duke of Brabant, built on the Coudenberg.

The fortress was built in the 11th century or at the latest in the early 12th century. It was a fortified residence for the House of Louvain who ruled the Duchy of Brabant in which Brussels was located. Its construction on top of the hill gave it an excellent strategic position. It was enclosed by the city wall constructed in the 13th century. The game-filled countryside outside the walls was the Duke's hunting ground, whilst the church dedicated to St James served as the ducal chapel. It had been a hospice for pilgrims, but it became part of a monastery of the order of St Augustine.

History From the second half of the 13th century onwards the Dukes of Brabant chose the castle as their main residence. Brussels thus became the political centre of Brabant and, from the 15th century onwards, centre of all of the principalities making up the Netherlands. The castle gradually lost its military fortress appearance to become a palace and the seat of central institutions (see model of Brussels in the 17th century). The palace was destroyed in the terrible fire of 1731. In 1775 work started on the current place Royale, the church of Saint-Jacques-sur-Coudenberg and the Royal district. As in the past, the upper town is still host to the country's main political institutions.

● *Today: place Royale – rue Royale. Vestiges are visible at the 'Charles V' archaeological site. Information: +32 (0)2 545 08 00 - www.coudenberg.com.*

7

The Cantersteen

One of the town's fortified stone houses.

Steenen were fortified stone houses that belonged to most important families and that protected the town before the construction of the first city wall. Their construction materials set them apart from more modest homes, most of which had thatched roofs and walls made of wood, wattle and daub. By the 12th century there were already about a dozen steenen. As they were built before roads had been laid out, they undoubtedly had an impact on their future routes.

History Over the years the steenen disappeared and made way for new residential buildings. The Cantersteen was turned into an aristocratic hotel in the late 16th century and then into a hotel for travellers in the 18th century. The Cantersteen district was destroyed when the underground junction between the North Station and the South Station was built (1908-1952). Nowadays, the memory of the steenen lives on in road names such as Cantersteen, Plattesteen and rue des Pierres.

● *Today: place de l'Albertine.*

8

Corner tower of the city wall

Ramparts constructed in the 13th century to protect the town's various districts.

By the beginning of the 13th century, Brussels' demographic, commercial, political and religious development was sufficient to merit a defensive infrastructure to complement that already provided by the ducal castle, the steenen belonging to important families and the wooden fence

that would probably have already been there. The four kilometre long wall had watchtowers and a parapet. It was defended by an impressive ditch. These ramparts enabled Brussels to stand out from the neighbouring countryside and create a prestigious impression. The wall was irregular because it took advantage of the landscape's natural defences and surrounded all the areas of the upper and lower town. The corner tower shown here was located near the Steenpoort, one of the seven fortified gates regulating entry to the town and enabling taxes to be raised on goods.

History The population of the town increased from around 5 – 10,000 in the 13th century to around 25,000 in the 14th century. A large number of people were therefore obliged to live outside of the walls. In order to protect them it was necessary to build a second wall. This was built between 1357 and 1383 and was eight kilometres long. The new urban space created by the wall was large enough to accommodate urban expansion until the end of the 18th century. The first wall was demilitarised in the 16th century and it gradually merged into the town and disappeared. The second wall was demolished in the late 18th century and was replaced with large leafy boulevards in the early 19th century. In the 1950s these boulevards were turned into roads for cars and are now known as the small 'ring' (see current map of the Brussels pentagon on the floor of this room).

● *Today: Tower known as 'Anneessens' tower on boulevard de l'Empereur (next to Crosly bowling, opposite the PS building).*

9

Church of Notre-Dame de la Chapelle

Parish church in the Chapelle district, located outside the first city wall.

A chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary was first built here in the first half of the 12th century. It became a parish church in 1210, then made way for a new church built in several phases during the 13th century. The church was situated on the rue Haute which follows the route of what is without a doubt the oldest road linking Brussels with the South. The church was a focal point in the district inhabited by workers in the cloth industry (weavers, fullers and shearers) and tanners. It is believed that the Chapelle district was deliberately left outside the first city wall due to fears that these working communities could cause disturbances.

History Due to the expansion of the cloth industry in the 13th and 14th centuries, the Chapelle district grew rapidly. It was then included in the urban areas enclosed within the second city wall that was built in the second half of the 14th century. The church changed several times over the centuries. Traditionally the Chapelle district is called the 'Marolles' (the name of the former convent of the sisters of the *Mariam Colentes* community that was established there in the 17th century). The painter Bruegel is also associated with the area. A memorial in the church of Notre-Dame de la Chapelle reminds us that he was buried there in 1569. The area has always been a working class area, but it has recently been somewhat gentrified due to the presence of the more affluent Sablon district nearby.

● *Today: church of Notre-Dame de la Chapelle.*

10

The Grain Hall (Corenhuys)

Covered structure containing the grain market.

The hall was a simple 13th century wooden structure housing the grain market. It is thought that the upper market (*Bovenmerct*), that was a counterpart to the lower market (*Nedermerct*), must have been situated between the Grain Hall and the fortified gate of the second wall known as the Steenpoort.

History The Grain Hall survived until the early 17th century when it was demolished after the grain market moved elsewhere. The square was damaged in the bombardment of 1695 and was then rebuilt and enlarged. In the 18th century, coaching inns for postal and travelling coaches were found there. The square was renovated in the 20th century and has become lively once again.

● *Today: place de la Vieille Halle aux Blés.*

11

St John's hospital

The largest hospice in Brussels for poor citizens.

Several hospitals had already been built in Brussels by the 12th century. They testify to the scale of the urban development, but also to the appearance of new forms of assistance. These institutions offered hospitality: they provided accommodation for poor citizens when they fell ill and for old people and pilgrims stopping over in Brussels. The St John's hospital was founded in the late 12th century and became one of the most important hospitals in the region. It was managed by a community of friars and nuns, under the supervision of secular tutors appointed by the city authorities. A church was added to the hospital in the 13th century.

History As the centuries passed, treating and curing the sick started to take priority over simply offering hospitality and preparing people for a Christian death. St John's hospital and the church were both completely destroyed in the 1840s. A new neoclassical style urban district was laid out in their place. The St John's hospital moved to the Pacheco district near the Jardin botanique.

● *Today: place Saint-Jean, rue Saint-Jean and rue Duquesnoy.*

12

The collegiate church of St Michael and Gudula

Brussels' main church, established on a hill by the Duke of Brabant.

Along with the Senne valley and the Coudenberg, the hill that was to be known as the *Treurenberg* (mount of tears) was

one of the three main focal points of the town that was enclosed within the first city wall in the 13th century. A chapel dedicated to the archangel St Michael may have been built there as early as the 9th century. In the mid 11th century, the Duke of Brabant founded a collegiate church in its place (i.e. a church served by a chapter of canons). It was dedicated to St Michael and to St Gudula, whose miraculous relics were kept in a crypt underneath the choir. It became the city's main church. The Romanesque church was rebuilt in the Gothic style in the 13th century.

History As Brussels gradually acquired the status of a political centre, the collegiate church of St Michael and Gudula became the main church in the Duchy of Brabant and then in the whole of the Netherlands. The church's reconstruction in the Gothic style began in the 13th century and continued into the 15th century. It was sacked during the 16th century wars of religion but was spared in the bombardment of 1695. In the 19th century it was greatly restored. When Belgium became an independent state in 1830, Brussels was confirmed as the capital city and the church therefore continued to serve as a prestigious backdrop for numerous official ceremonies. In 1962, Brussels (along with Malines) became centre of an archdiocese and the church was therefore elevated to cathedral status.

● *Today: cathedral of St Michael and Gudula. Vestiges visible at the cathedral archaeological site.*

Information: +32 (0)2 219 75 30 – www.cathedralestmichel.be.