

By Joseph Dubois

## High town

1

### Coudenberg palace

The palace on the Coudenberg was the residence of the Dukes of Brabant around which a prominent district developed in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The palace was extended by successive rulers in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Philip the Good had the *Magna Aula* or great hall built between 1452 and 1459, amongst other things. The Emperor Charles V added the chapel in 1522-1552. The City of Brussels funded a large part of the construction and refurbishment of the palace. The *Balieplein* (now place Royale) in front of the palace served initially as a display area where the people of the city came to admire princely ceremonies.

**History** The building was destroyed by fire in 1731. The governors then moved into Nassau palace, after which the ruins of the old palace remained undisturbed for four decades. The place Royale and a completely new district in the classical style were built in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.  
● *Today: Vestiges of the Aula Magna, the Balieplein and the inner courtyard can be found beneath the modern-day place Royale and can be seen at the 'Charles V' archaeological site.*

2

### Chapel of St James on the Coudenberg

This Gothic church served as a chapel to the court and therefore enjoyed greater prestige than other chapels in Brussels.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century it was used for baptisms in the ducal family. As the regular canons of St Augustine who served this church belonged to a prominent monastic order, they had greater independence of

the church of St Michael and St Gudula.  
**History** The church suffered serious damage during the fire in Coudenberg palace in 1731. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was entirely converted in the classical style according to plans drawn up by the French architect Barré at the time of the redevelopment of the Montagne de la Cour.

● *Today: The classical church of Saint-Jacques-sur-Coudenberg in the place Royale still exists.*

3

### Coudenberg gate

The gate was part of the original city wall and by the 17<sup>th</sup> century it no longer served any defensive purpose.

The main trading route through the city, the *Steenweg* or *Chaussée*, ran beneath the Coudenberg gate. From the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the gate building itself was used successively as a prison, a storage place for archives and an arms store.

**History:** The gate, along with the other parts of the original city wall, was gradually integrated into the fabric of the city and finally demolished in 1761. The road was widened when the Royal district was established.

● *Today: All that remains of the gate today is part of the foundations, which lie three meters below the rue de Namur, where it crosses the rue de Brederode.*

4

### Aerschot-Croÿ mansion

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this spacious manor house belonged to the de Croÿ family, lords of Aerschot, and included a forecourt and an inner courtyard.

Antoine de Croÿ acquired the old manor house in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and had it adapted at the expense of the City. The de Croÿs, lords of Aerschot, rose quickly once they entered the service of the Burgundians and remained in this residence for over two centuries. Charles de Croÿ had the house rebuilt in 1603-1605.

**History** The residence was rebuilt in the classical style by the Countess of Templeuve when the Royal district was established in 1776-1787. Later on, it moved into the possession of the Arconatic-Visconti family, after which it housed successively the Ministry of War and the Royal Grammar School of Brussels. Later still, the Count of Flanders lived here, and King Albert I was born here in 1875.

● *Today: The classical building in place Royale now houses the Treasury.*

5

### Merode-Lannoy mansion

The Merode-Lannoy family lived in this manor house.

The building was constructed on the basis of the same plan as the Aerschot-Croÿ mansion, with a forecourt and an inner courtyard. The entire building was separated from the street by a porch decorated with ornamental foliage.

**History** In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Countess of Lannoy sold the house to the guild of brewers. In 1777 they erected a new pavilion in the classical style when the Royal district was rebuilt.

6

### Hoogstraeten-Lalaing mansion

This manor house in the Gothic style lay between the ducal palace and the first Jewish Stairway.

Initially the residence belonged to Antoine de Lalaing, who was made Count of Hoogstraten by Charles V. The small chapel and gallery dated from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**History** In 1774 the building became the property of the City of Brussels. In 1777 it was rebuilt and connected to the buildings adjoining the place Royale.

● *Today: The underground remains of this mansion can be seen at the 'Charles V' archaeological site.*

7

### Mansion of David Teniers II

The house of David Teniers II bore witness to the affluent lifestyle of the court artist in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

When he moved from Antwerp to Brussels in 1651, David Teniers II, court artist of governors Leopold Guillaume and Don Juan of Austria, bought a piece of land when the old Ravenstein domain was sold. The mansion in the Flemish Renaissance style which he built included an inner courtyard with a fountain. The complex included a living area, a workshop and an exhibition gallery.

● *Today: The classical building in place Royale now serves as the cafeteria and bookstore of the Museum of Fine Arts.*



9

### Nassau palace

The Nassau family lived in this palace. Its splendour rivalled that in the palace of the Dukes of Brabant.

Knight Willem van Duyenvoorde, a confidant of Duke John III of Brabant, began construction in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century. It was inherited by the Nassau family, who lived there until the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the palace was extended by Engelbert, Count of Nassau. It was built around a central inner courtyard reached through a porch in the form of a tower. Small towers with wooden spires were built in each corner and in the centre.

**History:** After the fire at the ducal palace in 1731, the governors moved in. Governor Charles of Lorraine purchased it from the Orange-Nassau family in 1756 and added a facade in the classical style. During the French rule, the buildings of Nassau palace were to be used first as the 'Ecole Centrale' and subsequently as a university. The park was transformed into a botanical garden. Under the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, a library, a museum, a grammar school and an academy were included. In 1827, an L-shaped building was added in the same classical style for the Museum of Industry. After 1830 the Royal Library, the Museum of Arms, Arms Equipment and Antiquities, the Museum of Art and Sculpture, the Natural History Museum and the State Archives were established here.

● *Today: The old palace garden corresponds to the current place du Musée, beneath which lies the Museum of Modern Art, illuminated by a semicircular light source.*

**History:** In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the facade was decorated in a simple, classical style, altering the earlier appearance completely. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the building accommodated a school. The house was torn down in 1910 when the Isabel district was demolished.

● *Today: The modern-day rue Villa Hermosa lies on the site of the old first Jewish Stairway. The former residence of David Teniers II had to make way for the Palais des Beaux-Arts, now known as Bozar.*

8

### Cleve-Ravenstein court

Philip of Cleve built this residence in the Renaissance style in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

When Philip of Cleve settled in Brussels, the City granted him financial support to rebuild the *Melderthuis*, previously the property of an old aristocratic family. During the religious wars of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, soldiers were housed here, and after this it fell into disrepair. David Teniers purchased part of the domain. The 'Court of Ravenstein' was sold on to the tapestry and silk merchant Gaspard Ruffin. The Jewish Stairways ran alongside the house - stepped streets that derived their name from the Jewish district of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**History** The outer facade of the left-hand wing was decorated in the style of Louis XVI in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the part of the building still remaining was restored by the architects Sainenoy and Malfait in the neo-Gothic style.

● *Today: The Court of Ravenstein next to the Palais des Beaux Arts or Bozar, is the only building in this part of the model that is still standing today. The Royal Belgian Film Archives are now stored here.*

## Low town

I0

### St Catherine's dock

The dock was part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century port within the city. Ships sailing to Brussels from Antwerp along the Scheldt, the Rupel and the Willebroeck canal moored here.

St Catherine's dock was excavated in 1564 on the site of the former *Beghynengracht* that ran along the original city wall. It was the last and the deepest of three docks that formed a continuation of the canal in the city. After St Catherine's dock and the new port came into service, the old mooring place along the Senne was abandoned. A lively district grew up around the docks, a meeting place for tradesmen and citizens.

**History** St Catherine's dock fell out of use and was filled in in 1853. This was the first phase of a gradual process during which the port facilities were moved to the canal zone farther and farther from the city centre, until eventually the entire inner port was moved outside the limits of Brussels. Filling in the dock created the space needed for the construction of the new St Catherine's church.

● *Today: The location of St Catherine's dock corresponds to St Catherine's church and the market square in front of it.*

I1

### Black Tower

This tower is part of the original city wall dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Large parts of the original city wall and a number of towers were still standing in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, even though the city had had a new wall encompassing a larger area since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The original city wall no longer filled a defensive purpose,



but many portions of the wall formed part of later buildings. The tower was taken into private ownership from the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**History** In due course, the tower was enclosed by a series of buildings that hid it from sight. When it was rediscovered during remediation work in the surrounding district in 1887, Burgomaster Charles Buls argued in favour of preserving it. The Black Tower was one of the first structures in Brussels to be preserved as a monument. It was restored by Victor Jamaer.

● *Today: The Black Tower is still standing, behind St Catherine's church and is surrounded by a new hotel building.*

I2

### Old St Catherine's church

This church was one of the oldest places of worship in Brussels.

The 13<sup>th</sup> century chapel was replaced in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries by a larger, Gothic church. After being plundered by iconoclasts in 1566, the church was rebuilt in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The front facade of the old St Catherine's church bordered the *Steenweg*. When the tower had still not been completed after twenty years, the municipal council intervened to provide financial support. After all, the church was located in a poor parish.

**History** In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the church building was severely criticised for its lack of uniformity of style. Architects Poelaert and Janssens constructed a new St Catherine's church on the filled-in St Catherine's dock. The old church was not demolished until 1893. The tower was kept as a clock tower for the new church.

● *Today: The tower is the only part of the old St Catherine's church still standing.*

I3

### Fish Market and Chaussée

The Fish Market was located at the crossroads of the *Chaussée* and the *Senne*.

This square, surrounded by covered fish stalls, was used as a fish market. The old quay became free when the port was moved to St Catherine's dock. In 1601, Archdukes Albert and Isabella decided to move the fish market from the *Chaussée* or *Steenweg* (at the site of the modern-day *rue Marché aux Herbes*) to this spot.

**History** When the *Senne* was vaulted in 1867, the surrounding districts also disappeared. The Central Halls were erected on the site of the Fish Market. A few years later, the fish market was moved to a new building on the site of the filled-in Merchants' dock. The Central Halls were demolished and replaced by a modern structure that includes 'Parking 58'.

● *Today: The building containing 'Parking 58' is still standing on this spot.*

I4

### Franciscan monastery

This 13<sup>th</sup> century monastery still fulfilled an important role in the city in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Franciscans were more popular with the people than the richer monastic orders.

The 13<sup>th</sup> century monastery developed over the following centuries into an extensive complex. Its Gothic chancel was destroyed by the Calvinists in 1583 and rebuilt in 1588. The grave of Duke John I (1261-1294) was also vandalised during the plundering. The Archdukes Albert and Isabella (1598-1621) later built a cenotaph here to replace it. The old church building basically remained standing until the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

**History** The nave was burned down during

the bombardment of 1695. The church was rebuilt and extended further during the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was demolished during the French rule and replaced by the Butter Market. The stock exchange building was constructed here when the *Senne* was vaulted (1867).

● *Today: Little remains of the foundations of the Franciscan church (which can be visited at the *Bruxella 1238* archaeological site). Most of it was destroyed when the *Bourse* was built.*

I5

### St Nicholas' church

St Nicolas' church, dedicated to the patron saint of merchants, stood in the heart of the trading district.

Iconoclasts destroyed the old St Nicholas' church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but it was quickly rebuilt. A whole series of Brussels guilds had an altar here. The tower next to the church was destroyed by a storm in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and rebuilt. In 1622, St Nicholas' church became a parish church.

**History** After the bombardment of 1695, the tower and church were rebuilt using the City's last remaining funds. In 1741, the tower collapsed again, and this time it disappeared from the skyline for good. In 1799, during the French rule, the church was plundered.

● *Today: The substantially restored church still stands in the *rue au Beurre*. Its original character was restored by rebuilding previously demolished houses against the outer walls of the church.*

I6

### Corner of the Grand-Place

I7

### Saint-Géry church

This Gothic church stood in the centre of the Saint-Géry island.

At this spot, where one of the oldest Brussels settlements once stood, a new church was built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The district was often cut off from the rest of the city by the flooding of the *Senne*, which meant that the faithful were unable to fulfil their religious duties. Consequently, in 1520 the parish became autonomous under pressure from governors Margaret of Austria, Charles V and the pope.

**History** The church disappeared between 1789 and 1801 during the French rule. A pyramid-shaped fountain from Grimbergen abbey was placed in the new square. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the appearance of the district changed considerably. The Saint-Géry Halls also date from this period (1881). After the Second World War, traders began using the halls less and less. The building was closed in 1977.

● *Today: The Saint-Géry Halls have housed an Info centre on urban development and the environment since 1999 (Brussels-Capital Region).*

I8

### Mill

The *Ruysmolen* stood on one of the branches of the *Senne* encircling the Saint-Géry island.

A number of mills from earlier periods were converted for use in industrial activities such as paper manufacture in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. **History** The *Ruysmolen* disappeared when the *Senne* was vaulted and the central avenues were created.

● *Today: The site of the old mill can be found in the modern-day street called *Borgval*.*

I9

### Poor Clares monastery

The Poor Clares arrived in Brussels towards the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, they settled in the old buildings of the *Brethren of Common Life*.

At first, the Poor Clares settled in the neighbourhood of the Hal gate, but they moved to the Saint-Géry district in 1588 after their monastery was set on fire during the religious wars. The Malines architect Luc Fayd'herbe built a church for them in the Flemish baroque style in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

**History** The monastery ceased to exist in 1796 during the French rule and the church was converted into a storage facility for weapons. In 1804, the building was once again used as a church. It was now accessible to laymen and took in parishioners from the demolished Saint-Géry church.

● *Today: The church still stands in the Saint-Géry district. Homes have now been established in a number of the monastery buildings dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century.*

I20

### Notre-Dame de Bon Secours

This church near St James' hospital was one of the starting points for a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella in Spain.

An old chapel belonging to St James' hospital originally stood here. By the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, this chapel had fallen into disrepair. Thanks to a miraculous statue of the Virgin Mary found by a cobbler on a refuse heap, the church gained new life. The Infante Isabella (1598-1621) placed the church under her protection. As the building soon became too small, the architect Cortvrindt built a new church in the Italian-Flemish baroque style in 1664, with a polygonal design and a hexagonal dome. **History** The church was closed in 1797 during the French rule.

● *Today: The church still standings in the vicinity of place Fontainas.*