

During the twelfth century Europe is shaken by an intellectual revolution. This cultural revolution gives rise to the birth of the university in the first half of the thirteenth century. The monasteries, which had been hitherto the main intellectual centers, give ground little to the newly created universities in large European cities: Bologna then Paris, Oxford, Cambridge, Heidelberg ...

With a Papal Bull in 1245 Pope Innocent IV vigorously encouraged the Cistercians to go to Paris and study theology, philosophy, literature... and then to transmit their knowledge to their fellow-brothers.

It is an English monk, Étienne de Lexington, abbot of Clairvaux, who initiated the project of the Collège Saint Bernard, soon known as Collège des Bernardins, to serve as a place of study and research at the very heart of Christian thought. In 1248, less than one half-century after the creation of the University of Paris, the construction of the Collège des Bernardins began, financed through Christian philanthropy and influenced by the architectural model of Cistercian abbeys.

During more than four centuries the Collège des Bernardins accommodated hundreds of students and contributed to the intellectual development of the City and the University of Paris.

In 1338, Pope Benedict XII, a former pupil and emeritus professor of the Collège des Bernardins, gave financial help to the construction of the imposing church of the Bernardins, of which only the sacristy remains today. The church was partly destroyed by the creation of the rue de Pontoise (1810) and then by the opening of the Boulevard Saint Germain (1859).

At the time of the French Revolution, the Collège des Bernardins became state property. After a period as a jail, it was soon transformed into a warehouse, and then served briefly again as a school for the Christian Brothers congregation before becoming between 1845 and 1995 a fire station and then a residential school for the Police Academy.

Under the leadership of Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, the Collège des Bernardins, which had become a listed building in 1887, was finally repurchased in 2001 by the Diocese of Paris, from the City of Paris, in order to offer to the city a daring cultural project in the service of mankind and his future.

Since September 2008 the Collège des Bernardins has been open to the general public for the first time in its history.

Collège des Bernardins
20 rue de Poissy - 75005 Paris

Access
Subway : Maubert-Mutualité,
Cardinal Lemoine, Jussieu
Bus : 24, 47, 63, 67, 86, 87, 89
Parking : Maubert – Collège des Bernardins
(adjacent to 39 bd Saint-Germain)

Opening Hours :

- From Monday to Saturday from 10 am to 6 pm
- Sundays and holidays from 2 pm to 6 pm (except special events)

Guided visits - informations and reservations

- For individuals : 01 53 10 74 44
- For groups : 01 53 10 74 40

The financing of the Collège des Bernardins relies partially on the donations from corporations and private benefactors. If you wish to contribute, please contact the Bernardins Foundation :
developpement@fondationdesbernardins.fr
ou 01 53 10 02 74

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THE COLLÈGE DES BERNARDINS

English guide


COLLÈGE DES
BERNARDINS

Photos: DR, Laurence de Terfne, Domitille Chaudieu, Sabato Renzullo.

HISTORY

FROM THE

XIIIth CENTURY

TO OUR DAY

MISSION

The Collège des Bernardins is a space dedicated to the hopes of mankind and to the discussion of questions that confront not only our society but also Christian through. It is open to everyone and invites you take part in these dialogues through the activities of reflexion and research, education or artistic expression.

In order to connect with men and women in all their spiritual, intellectual and affective diversity, the Collège des Bernardins has a pluri-disciplinary offering, including :

- exhibitions of contemporary art, the performed arts, music and activities for a younger public;
- meetings and debates (lectures, round tables, colloquia);
- theological and biblical education (École Cathédrale).

The Collège des Bernardins is supported by a Research Center with six departments: « Human societies and educational responsibilities», «The economy, man and society», «Biomedical ethics», «Society, freedom, peace», «Judaism and Christianity», «The language of art». The Bernardins Professorial Chair, held annually by an eminent international scholar, contributes to the development of the Research Cent.

The Large Auditorium

(open to visitors only during guided tours)

Located under the great medieval roof, the great auditorium (capacity 234 seats) welcomes conferences, concerts, forums, films... Equipped with a comprehensive communication platform, the latest technology rubs shoulders with the precious traces of the original building, oak beams dated 1150 as well as a large eighteenth bay window century with its basket handle vault with three centers.



The small auditorium and its rose window

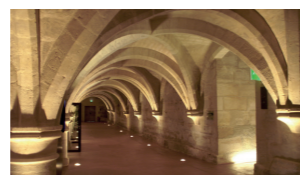
(open to visitors only during guided tours)



Also used as a classroom and conference hall, the small auditorium hosts numerous events with a capacity of 128 seats. **The thirteenth-century Cistercian rose window**, located on the north gable, gives an exceptional splendor to the building. Its preservation over the centuries made possible a new identical copy located today on the south side of the great auditorium.

Outdoor walk

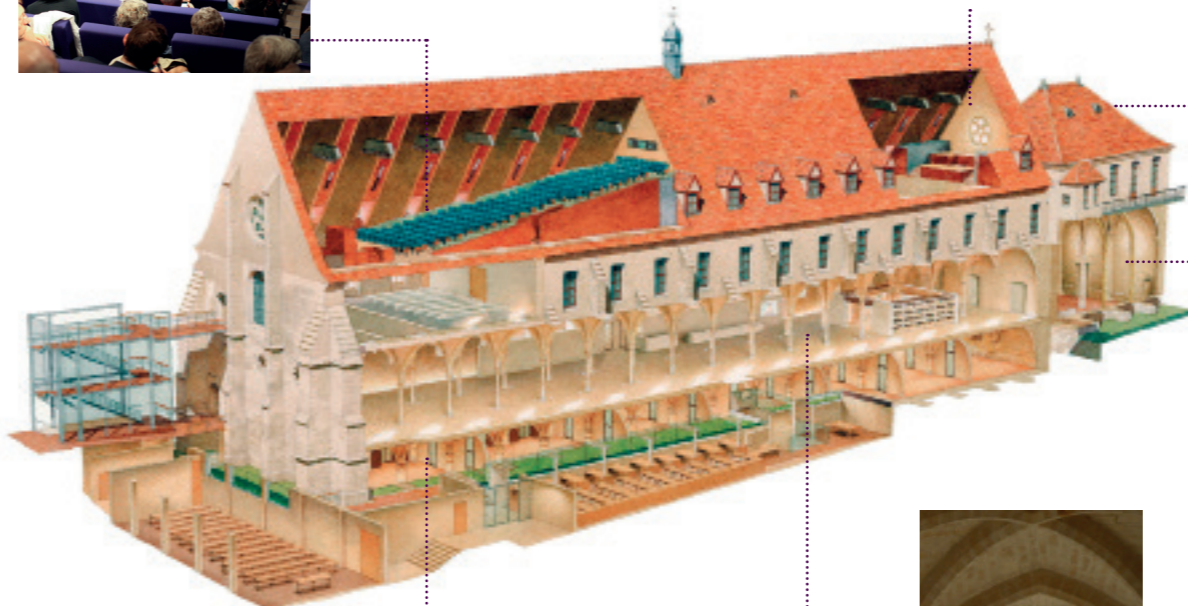
A walk outside the building offers pleasant surprises. From the garden you can still see an external boundary wall of the Collège des Bernardins as well as remains of the cellar. From the square you can appreciate the buttresses and the splendid medieval roof restored to its original volume with its tiles of six colors. At the back of the Collège des Bernardins the foundations of the old church are still visible.



The medieval cellar

(open to visitors only during guided tours)

Initially a storerroom, the cellar contains vestiges that reveal the original construction on alluvial ground. Since the beginning of the fourteenth century the monks installed buttresses called «buttons» against each column in order to try to stop the cellar from sinking. This cellar was finally filled in with earth as can be seen from a staircase starting at the level of the capitals of the pillars. Among the curiosities and evidence of the medieval life of the Collège des Bernardins you will find the twelfth century wall built to change the course of the river Bièvre. Now entirely restored, the Cellar houses a library - a 200 places multi-purpose room as well-as classrooms and meeting rooms.



The large nave

Once the monks' living place this space, exceptional for its sobriety and refinement, hosted classrooms, the refectory, the chapter and the kitchen. Built in accordance with Cistercian architecture, its 32 graceful columns were always obscured by partitions until the restoration works initiated in 2004. **70 meters long, 14 meters wide and 6 meters high, the nave offers for the first time this wonderful perspective.** Discovered during excavations under the foundations of the building, a statue of Christ, which dates back to the fourteenth century, overlooks this space. Today the nave hosts concerts, exhibitions and events. Visitors can also enjoy the Procure bookshop and the Table of the Bernardins café.



The eighteenth century spaces

(open to visitors only during guided tours)



The thirteenth-century building was remodelled during the eighteenth century. We can now admire the lightness of a freestanding staircase with Saracen vaults typical of this period. It hosts a mysterious headless statue from the early fifteenth century. The former apartments of the abbot are now used as classrooms and meeting rooms, providing a good overview of the architectural elegance of the «Age of Enlightenment».

The old gothic sacristy



contemporary art.

Built during the fourteenth century the sacristy was the link between the Church of the Bernardins, which was never completed, and the monks' building. With its majestic 11 meters under roof, it was built during to the Gothic Flamboyant period, but remains marked by Cistercian sobriety. We can discover the tombstone of Günter, a German monk from Thuringe who died in 1306, which reveals the European influence of the Collège des Bernardins. Completely restored, this area now hosts regular exhibitions of

ITS RESTORATION

The restoration and improvement works began in 2004 and were completed in August 2008. The work mobilized some thirty companies and hundreds of craftsmen : carpenters, stone-masons, joiners, etc. The architecture of one of the great buildings of medieval Paris has been entirely restored to its former splendor thanks to a unique restoration conducted jointly by the teams composed of the Departement of Historic Monuments under the leadership of Hervé Baptiste and the architectural practice of Jean-Michel Wilmotte. In June 2010, the Collège des Bernardins received the Prize or Cultural Heritage of the European Union competition called Europa Nostra, in the category «Conservation».

