

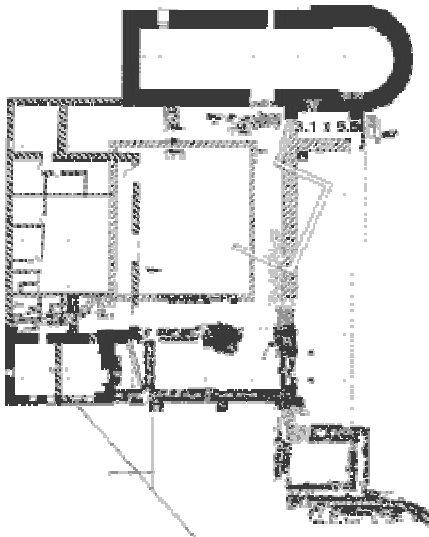
The Order of *Grandmont*.

The Order of *Grandmont* was founded by *Stephen* of *Muret* towards the close of the eleventh century at the time of the *Gregorian Reform*. *Stephen* elected to live his life as a hermit in the hills of *Ambazac*, North of *Limoges*. His successor effected the transfer of the disciples from *Muret* to the hillside of *Grandmont*. Lay brothers or convers and clerics who recited the offices lived together. King



Henry II, his sons *Richard I* and *John*, his grandson, *Henry III* patronised the early foundations of the hermits. The Order was eventually dissolved in 1772 by the Commission of Regulars. Its possessions were sold during the French Revolution, but a significant number of the houses had already been lost to the Order as the result of the Hundred Year's War while others suffered extensively during the sixteenth century Huguenot Uprising.

Stephen was formally canonised by pope *Clement III* in 1189. The simple, poor life which he led with his hermits in the solitude of *Muret* was a far cry from the elaborate, extravagant lifestyle of the *Grandmontine* monks in the following years and centuries.



Rule of St Stephen, some extracts.

Prologue: The one primary and fundamental Rule of Rules for our salvation and all others derive from [the Gospel]. We are all Christians, living the Rule of the Gospel, which is the root of all Rules.

ch. XXIV: We firmly forbid you to dare to plead your case against anyone or to enter into judgement in any way

ch. LIV: The better part which the Lord praised so highly in *Mary*, we impose upon the clerics alone [...]

In order that conversations with outsiders and care for exterior things shall not hinder the Divine Office [...] we entrust the temporal care of the monastery to the convers alone; in matters worldly and all other business, they are to command the other brethren, both clerics and convers [...]

ch. VI: Dedicate to the service of God alone the solicitude you would employ in buying, breeding, selling cattle.

ch. XXXIX: We forbid you absolutely to receive women into your observance.

Custumal

ch. 14: When the brethren find it necessary to work in compaigny with lay persons, they are on no account to remove their scapulars and they are to keep themselves apart save when the work in hand be concerned with carpentry or stone masonry.

ch.58: Since all excess is inappropriate to our religious life, the church and other buildings of our Order should be plain and free from all forms of excess.

The priory of *Rauzet*¹

The priory of *Rauzet* dates from the beginning of the thirteenth century. It is situated in undulating countryside on the edge of the forest of *Horte*, in the former county of *Angouleme* and close to the



Roman road which led from *Perigueux* to *Saintes*. It was formerly in the diocese of *Perigueux*.

The priory consisted of a North sited church and three range buildings grouped around a cloister. The chapter house and monks' accommodation were

located in the East range with the dormitory over. The South range housed the refectory and kitchen, while the West range was reserved for guest lodgings.

Traces of the West range remain in the form of two arched doorways and a corbel set into the wall



between the guest accommodation to the west and the remains of the kitchen to the south. This is where the principal entrance to the priory was located. The ground floor area alongside was used for storage purpose.

The church with its semi-circular apse is a perfect example of the

simplicity of *Grandmontine* architecture as imposed by the rule. The apse is slightly broader than the nave, which is typical of *Grandmontine* churches. A single aisled, barrel vaulted nave gives the impression of great height. Constructed throughout in limestone, the building is remarkable for the quality of its beautifully aligned coursework. The morning light penetrates the deeply embrasured east windows and in the evening it filters through the single window to the west.

When entering the church to celebrate the Divine office, the monks used the doorway connecting with the cloister. The laity were received in a porticus which covered the other entrance in the north wall. This doorway has a rounded arch supported on jambs which are ornamented with twin shafts bearing

¹ F-16320 *Combiere* (16 is *Charente* West France, East of *Cognac* and next to *Dordogne*).



capitals of simple waterleaf design. The only attempt at decoration can be found below the departure of the arches on either side of each of the three apsidal windows. They take the form of identically carved motifs with three grooves and correspond to the string course at the basis of the vaults inside.

The sanctuary is vaulted with a beautifully constructed semi-dome. A double piscina is recessed into the south section of the apsidal wall, while the opposite side houses an aumbry. In the passage alongside the church, which led from the cloister to the monk's cemetery, there is a similar aumbry. It served as a book cupboard. The chapter house is known from a text which says that it had the appearance of a chapel, which implies it was vaulted.

Fragments of columns and bare capitals indicate that stone arcades separated the cloister galleries from the garth. The corbels which carried the main beams of the pentice roofs are still in position.¹



The Association: ASEG *Rauzet*.

The Association to Safeguard the *Grandmontine* Church of *Rauzet* was founded on the 22nd of April 1986. Following a request from the Association, the church was classified on the 14th of December 1992, by the Ministry for Culture because of its historic context and the quality of its construction.

The association needs money to continue its restoration work. The apsidal vault has to be rebuilt. The nave and apse have no roof.

We would welcome any form of sponsorship. Any money raised will go to the conservation of the church.



Please find hereafter our international banking details for SWIFT money transfer.

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¹ Text *Martine Larigauderie*, I am most grateful to *Carole Hutchison* for correcting the translation