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From the drawing to the wall: the operational chain of building stone on the restoration worksite of St. Martin's church in Liège during the nineteenth century

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Introduction

The collegiate church of St Martin in Liege (Fig. 1-2) was founded shortly before 965 by the bishop Eraclus, at the summit of a promontory called "Publémont", located to the west of the historical centre of the city [1]. Rebuilt several times over the years, the current gothic church features an imposing fourteenth-century western tower, a nave with four spans and side chapels, a non-salient transept and a choir loft composed of three straight spans and a seven-sided apse, structures that were built in the sixteenth century [2]. At the end of the eighteenth century, the building was requisitioned by the French revolutionaries and converted into stables. In the time leading up to the re-establishment of the parochial ministry following the concordat of 1801, much damage was done to the building: the sacristy was pillaged, windows and stained-glass windows were broken, the marble was stolen, and finally, the lead and eaves gutters were torn off to be melted down, causing the infiltration of rainwater in several places [3]. For a period of around thirty years, the church council tried to carry out the most urgent repairs to keep the monument afloat by renewing the roof. The task was all the more delicate to manage as the economic fortunes of the institution had been greatly dented by the revolutionary seizures and no financial support was offered by the successive French and Dutch governments (1795-1815; 1815-1830) [4]. This precarious situation lasted until 1839, the year in which the administrative body in charge of the restoration and preservation of monuments in the young Kingdom of Belgium was set in motion [5].

Although the general history of restoration work on the church of St Martin after 1839 was clearly signposted by an article specifically dedicated to this subject [6], it should be noted that no elaborate study has yet been dedicated to the restoration work and its many different logistical, material, technical economic or human aspects. The documentation linked to this significant episode in the life of the monument is far from lacking. Indeed, the Fabric of the church preserved an extremely rich and under-used archive group that contains, among other things, precise details about the supply of materials for the construction and the workforce used during the work.

The present article focusses on the use of building stone during the first interventions carried out on the site, which involved the reconstruction of much of the masonry and buttresses of the choir loft and transept. The observations made here concern the years 1839-1845, the period for which the documentation is by far the most varied and abundant: debates and surveys by architects, building specifications, contracts, general accounting, yardage, receipts, invoices, orders etc., although some details are sadly lacking – including the architects' plans. The material remains of this period also allow archaeological observations *in situ*. This wealth of documents makes it possible to recreate, with a high level of certainty, the operational chain of the materials used during the

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first years of one the most prestigious and earliest building works carried out in the city of Liège and on a broader scale, the Kingdom of Belgium.

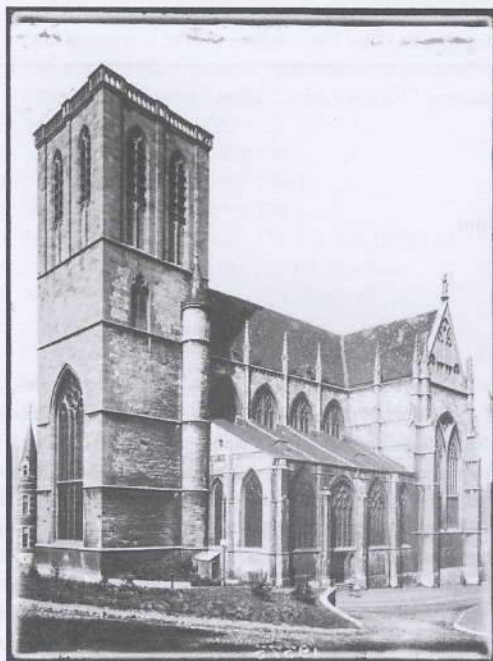


Fig 1. The church of Saint-Martin in Liège.
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Fig 2. The church of Saint-Martin in Liège.
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The history of surveys and operations

In September 1839, a delegation from the Royal Commission for Monuments, during a visit to Liège, inspected the church of Saint Martin (Fig. 3) and observed that the external masonry of the edifice was so degraded that it could soon constitute a danger to public safety. The institution promptly sent a report to the Minister of the Interior, the minister responsible, and also to the Governor of the Province outlining its fears and recommended an urgent intervention while at the same time praising the artistic merits of the monument [7].

In December, the architect Jean-Noël Chevron (1790-1867), on the request of the church wardens, compiled an exhaustive report on the state of the building. His conclusion was grim: the external masonry was cracked in several places, many facings had shattered from the effects of frost, some of the walls were worryingly bulging, fragments of masonry had fallen to the floor of the building, and finally, some of the pinnacles crowning the buttresses showed an overhang. The architect identified the weaknesses to the buttresses for the choir loft and transept and recommended a partial reconstruction of several of them, particularly to the upper sections[8]. Following several requests by the communal administration, an estimate for the external work was drawn up in June of the following year. In this seventeen-page document, the architect estimated the cost of each operation to

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replace a cubic metre of stone: price of material at the quarry, cladding, transport, shaping and placement of new stones, restoration of old stonework, installation of anchoring rods, removal of rubble [9].

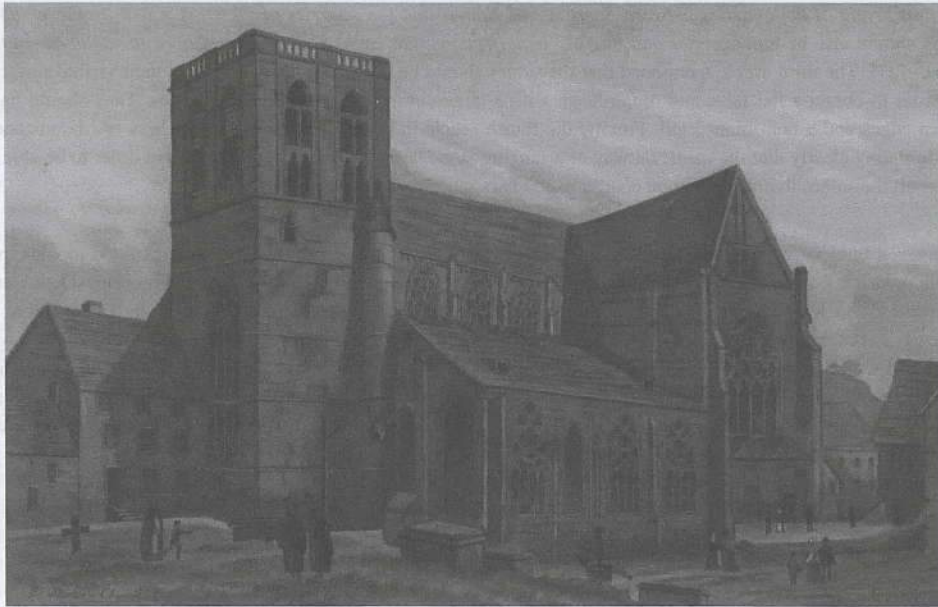


Fig 3. The church of Saint-Martin in Liège in 1830. Watercolour by Joseph Fussell. © Musée Wittert – Collections artistiques ULiège.

Although the urgency of the work was pointed out by the *Commission royale des Monuments*, no restoration was initiated during the following years even though the situation only worsened, and several reminders were sent to the higher authorities.[10] This lethargy was explained by the low-income levels of the Church Council which did not have the means to finance costly initiatives. The institution approached different agencies to negotiate precious subsidies for the future of the monument: The City of Liege, the Province of Liege and the Minister for Justice via the Administration of Religious Affairs. This inactivity persisted until April 1843, following the decision of the City Council to grant a sum of 10,000 francs for the restoration work [11]. Financing the restoration work remained a thorny problem during the coming years and affected the smooth running of operations on more than one occasion [12].

The *Commission royale des Monuments* gave priority to the renewal of masonry and two buttresses of the Northern arm of the transept [13]. After referring to the recommendations of the architect [14], the City of Liege advised the Church Council not to appoint the future contractor by public tender as was the custom, because this delicate work “required a suitably experienced workforce..., good workers, and continuous supervision by an intelligent foreman”[15]. On the other hand, it authorised this *modus operandi* to choose the stone supplier[16]. The Church Council drew up detailed specifications, which were finalised on November 26th 1843 [17]. An appeal was then launched in three daily newspapers: *Journal de Liège et de la Province*, *La Tribune* and *Gazette de Liège* [18].

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The specifications comprised four articles concerning the stones to be used. The first stated that the volume necessary to restore the parts mentioned above was around 40 cubic metres. The second stipulated that the stones should be "the same sort" [19] that had been used in the original construction and should be extracted "from the hardest layers of the quarries between Samson and Namur and the quarries of the Ourthe and Ambleve" [20]. They should also be homogenous and free of "imperfections that could harm the solidity or the neatness of the work" [21]. The third article mentioned that the stones should be cut with a sharp chisel on their visible surfaces in order to obtain a flat face, and rough-hewn with a large cutting edge on their undersides. They should have sharp edges and a non-thinned tail. Finally, the fourth article indicates the layout of stretchers and bondstones, while stating clearly that the medieval way of arranging stone layers must be complied with in order to be able to reuse all the stones that were in good condition and harmonise the two works[22].

The seven bidders for the project were judged on the price they offered per running metre of hood moulds, per cubic metre of archstone and parallelepipedal blocks. In competition with Philippe Fincoeur, Dieudonné Carpentier and Jean Joseph Lhoneux in Liège, A. P. Legrand and Tonglet in Huy, Jean-Louis Lambermont in Esneux and Antoine Joseph Lejeune in Lille, it was the master quarryman Henri Mention in Tilff who was entrusted with the work [23]. He had worked on several quarries including one with "petit granit" at Comblain-au-Pont which was to supply most of the stones necessary for the operations. The village is located around fifteen kilometres south of Liège and is watered by the Ourthe, a tributary of the Meuse, two waterways by means of which the stones would be transported (cf. *infra*; Fig. 4).

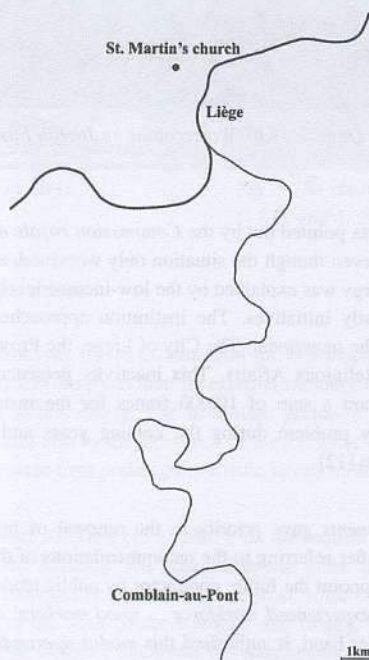


Fig 4. Liège, Comblain-au-Pont and their current hydrographic network.

Here we will mention the materials in question. The stone used in medieval construction was a limestone from the Viséan ground of the Lower Carboniferous, commonly known as "limestone of the Meuse" or "bluestone". It is found in quarries located along the river, between Namur and Engis. The "petit granit" used by Henri Mention is not granite in the geological sense of the term. In reality, it is a crinoidal limestone from the Tournaisian soils of the Lower Carboniferous. These two varieties of stone present essentially similar characteristics: a white-grey patina, a good resistance to compression and atmospheric pollution in addition to an excellent cuttability facilitating fine sculpture polishing. The "small granit" offers the advantage of being frost-proof, unlike the "Meuse limestone" [24].

In the contract he signed on December 13th 1843, Henri Mention committed to lodging 500 francs to the *Banque liégeoise* by way of a guarantee for the construction, and also presented two solvent guarantors, Pierre Charlier and Maximilien Delbart, owners in Tilff [25]. The document specified that the materials would be delivered into the garden next to the church at the cost of the entrepreneur. Before unloading, the stones would be inspected by a delegated individual from the Church Council, which would have the right to reject them if they failed to meet the standards required by the specifications. Any stone that was rejected would have to be replaced within fifteen days under penalty of a fine. If the deliveries exceeded the deadline, the Church Council could demand a payment of 25 Francs per day of delay and purchase the stones from another supplier of its choice at the expense of the contractor. The payment would be made in two instalments, one on delivery and the other six months later [26].

Having established the rules of the game, it was now necessary to choose a project creator. The restoration was entrusted to the architect Jean-Charles Delsaux (1821-1893), who was believed to have a bright future ahead of him as he was due to become the provincial architect the following year and would likely be entrusted with important projects in the Liege region [27]. The work began in April 1844, with the complete reconstruction of the wall of the transept [28]. On May 1st and 13th, the architects of the City and Province of Liege, in the persons of Julien-Étienne Rémont (1800-1883) and Isidore Jamolet (? -?), inspected the church and observed that the two north-west buttresses needed not to be partially reconstructed, but completely reconstructed, which had an impact on the predicted yardage [29].

Convinced that these buttresses had been altered by "repairs randomly done or in a spirit of saving money" [30], Jean-Charles Delsaux intended to restore them in their ancient style, using their counterparts on the southern arm of the transept, which were crowned with pinnacles, as a model. He justified this addition by means of two arguments: to strengthen the buttresses to enable them to resist the thrust of the vaults and increase the beauty of the monument which was visible from many locations within the city (Fig. 5) [31]. The presence of analogous adornments in the Church of Saint Jacques in Liege, a contemporary of the Church of Saint Martin, convinced the City of Liege and the *Commission royale des Monuments* [32].

The drawings of Jean-Charles Delsaux were unfortunately not preserved. This can be explained by the fact that there was no legal obligation to submit plans before the year 1862, resulting in the loss of precious documents [33]. The administrative correspondence does give us some information on these elements, however. Therefore, the stones were standardised and numbered in accordance with their dimensions, from "A" to "Z" and "a" to "h", resulting in some thirty different formats for courses, vault stones and pinnacles [34]. This diversity was justified by the desire to respect the heights of irregular medieval courses, and bond the stones by aligning the vertical joints one course in two, although such a characteristic was nothing like primitive building. This conception had a double objective: on one hand, rationalizing the construction to optimise the technical gestures, the work time and therefore result in saving money; on the other hand, presenting a structure in harmony with the medieval building but of a quality that was adjudged to be superior.

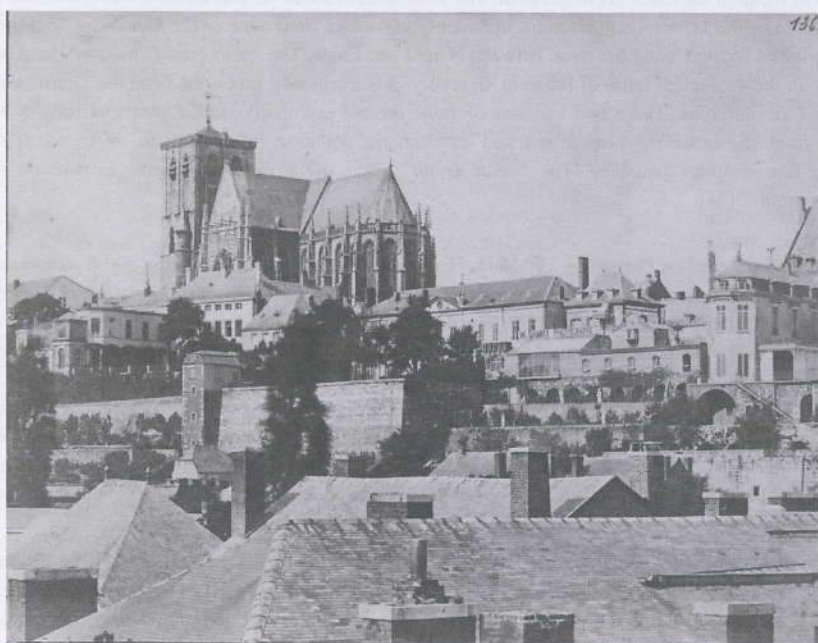


Fig 5. The church of Saint-Martin in Liège around 1880. Photograph by W. Damry. © Musée Wittert – Collections artistiques ULiège.

The demolition of the two buttresses was completed at the beginning of August. Julien-Étienne Rémont, Jean-Charles Delsaux, the master mason Libert Bayet and the master stone cutter Ferdinand Barbier were subsequently given directives for their reconstruction: preserve the medieval foundations, staple each new stone and, finally, bind the constructions by cutting the walls of the transept to anchor the buttresses to it [35].

A visit by Julien-Étienne Rémont on October 7th informs us that, on this date, the buttresses were newly reconstructed up to the creation of the vaults [36]. Another visit on November 12th by a delegation of the *Commission royale des Monuments*, indicated that the work planned for that year had ended [37]. The stones were nonetheless delivered until late in the year to give work to the stonecutters workshop during the winter (cf. *infra*) [38].

On March 31st 1845, Julien-Étienne Rémont and Isidore Jamolet inspected the restoration work and observed that, on one hand, the work completed the previous year was satisfactory, and on the other hand, the efforts during that year should focus on the buttresses of the apse so as not to place the vault of the sanctuary in danger [39]. Due to a lack of funding, only one of these buttresses was restored that year [40].

Supply of materials to the site

While the plans, estimates and yardages enabled the master quarryman to know in advance the exact volume of stone to be extracted [41], the orders were only made progressively, in accordance with the needs of the building project, the workload of the stone-cutters and the available financial resources. Seven to eight days passed between the order and the delivery. After this deadline, the Church Council called the master-quarryman to order [42].

The cargoes of rough-hewn blocks whose dimensions exceeded by a few centimetres those of the stones to be used in the building [43], were transported by various boatmen who followed the course of the Ourthe and the Meuse, or by haulage. The blocks were unloaded on a quay situated near the Pont de la Boverie, which is demolished today, around two kilometres as the crow flies from the church (Figs. 6-7) [44]. They were then brought by carriers to the garden of the Church Council where they were checked and later rejected if they had even the tiniest flaw [45]. At least during the first delivery or during a delivery of samples, Julien-Étienne Rémont was delegated to carry out these checks, which then fell to a member of the Church Council, probably assisted by the director of works (cf. *infra*) [46].



Fig 6. Evocation of the banks of the Meuse in Liège in the middle of the 19th century. Lithography by Henri Borremans. © Musée Wittert – Collections artistiques ULiège.

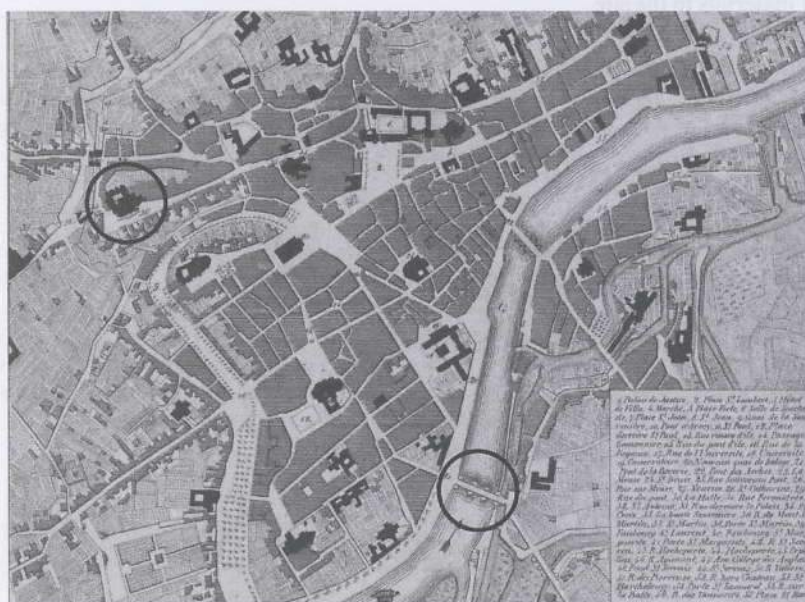


Fig 7. Situation of the pont de la Boverie and the Church of Saint-Martin in Liège, second third of the 19th century. Plan by Cremetti. © Musée Wittert – Collections artistiques ULiège.

Various receipts give us a clear picture of the supply of *petit granit* to the site between May 23rd and December 3rd 1844. During that period, 51 deliveries were carried out, totalling 509 blocks, for a volume of 107,268 cubic metres. The cargoes contained between 1 and 20 blocks, even though some journeys showed 36, 37 and 49, for a maximum value of 5,922 cubic metres [47]. This data suggests that the boatmen delivered the stone to other sites because it is difficult to imagine that the journeys would have taken place for such small volumes, or single stones [48]. There was no shortage of examples at that time : Sainte-Croix, Saint-Paul, Saint-Jacques, to name only the few best-known ones [49].

The stones came mainly from the quarries of Henri Mention, although some were delivered after September 10th by the master quarryman François Dehan who also exploited a quarry at Comblain-au-Pont (40 and 11 deliveries respectively). The intervention of this second master quarryman can be explained by certain complaints the Church Council made to Henri Mention during the previous month. Indeed, the institution was very displeased by the frequent delays in deliveries and the flaws in certain stones. The latter were rejected, which delayed the execution of the work [50]. Henri Mention mostly used the boatman Henri Ledent, while François Dehan worked with his colleague Léonard Coulon. The boatman Joseph Pahaut is only mentioned once in the records [51].

In 1845, the orders for delivery were still being made regularly, in restricted lots and under the same conditions as those mentioned previously [52]. According to the receipts kept, 39 deliveries were made between January 12th and July 31st, totalling 377 blocks, for a volume of 82,153 cubic metres. The stones now came from the quarries "Dehan Mention & Compagnie", which suggests that an agreement had been reached between the two master quarrymen. Here too, the cargoes included between 2 and 23 blocks, with an exceptional journey of 36 blocks, for

a maximum volume of 4,488 cubic metres. While Henri Ledent and Léonard Coulon are still the most used boatmen, Joseph Pahaut, Louis Hanson, Jaques Lagasse or a certain Malo also appear in the archives [53].

The workforce in the workplace

The master mason Libert Bayet was named director and supervisor of the work by the Church Council on April 22nd 1844 [54]. This choice can probably be explained by the fact that a member of his family, the master mason Simon Hairs-Bayet, had already been employed by the Church Council between 1833 and 1842 [55]. The latter probably wanted to hire people who had proved worthy and competent in the past. The stone cutters were directly employed by the master quarryman Henri Mention and directed in the workplace by the master stone cutter Ferdinand Barbier [56]. The repair to their tools was incumbent on the Church Council who hired the locksmith P. J. Warnand [57]. The latter also manufactured the lewis tools used for lifting the blocks [58]. To this effect, ropes, pulleys and a double-wheeled winch were purchased at the start of the project [59]. They were all paid bi-weekly [60].

The general accounts give the names of the team leaders but unfortunately not their composition. The teams must have been well-supported, and the site must have resembled a human ant hill. In 1845, during a period of financial difficulty, the Church Council informed the Minister for Justice that it would have to let go the 90 workers on the site if subsidies were not granted [61]. This number included workers belonging to specific occupations that are not dealt with in the context of this article: carpenters, joiners, plumbers, slate workers, painters and ironmongers [62]. During the winter of 1844-1845, a team composed of 13 to 14 stone cutters was kept on in the project's workshop in order to prepare the stones for the following season (cf. *infra*) [63]. It is to be noted that P. J. Warnand also worked, during the same period, on the restoration project for the Sainte-Croix Church, located a few hundred metres from Saint Martin. For the year 1846, he was paid 43.84 francs for having "re-sharpened" 2,923 tools at a cost of 1.5 francs per 100. At that time, the team of stone cutters working at Sainte-Croix was composed, on average, of five to eight weekly workers. They worked the same stone, but also the tufa of Maastricht, which was a lot softer. This comparison suggests, more than proves, the consequent and crucial work accomplished by P. J. Warnand on the Saint-Martin site. It is not possible, however, to extrapolate the figures present in the general accounts based on the prices suggested by the worker, because, this one, as well as repairing the stone cutters' tools, also forged lewis tools, staples, supplies pulleys, etc. He didn't do the job alone because the locksmiths Larose and Marnette also worked at making staples and "various irons" [64].

The rubble from the demolition of the buttresses and the scraps from the block-shaping were removed by cart by the carrier Noël Simon, without anyone knowing their final destination or the frequency of these operations [65].

The material remains

Observation of the monument confirms compliance with the specifications. Therefore, the facings were cut with a fine chisel, the impact of which, around 35/dm², are perpendicular to the upper and lower faces of the stone (Fig. 8). They are, moreover, so regular that it is difficult to identify the width of the cutting. A carving of around 5 to 6 cm borders the edges of the side faces. The result is in stark contrast to primitive stone masonry, some were cut with chisels but more freely and less systematically. This new aesthetic is part of this desire to "do better", already mentioned. The joints, of around 0.5 cm in thickness, present a neat and regular implementation. It should be pointed out that the lime supplied by Henri Mention and the master mason Libert Bayet [66], was prepared by unskilled workers but also by women whose presence during the work is often underestimated [67].



Fig 8. Facing restored in 1840's.

Conclusion

This study, based on archival holdings that have been largely under-used up to the present, sheds some light on the systems for supply of materials to the restoration by lithic materials in Liege during a period when an intense policy of restoration and conservation of historical monuments, directly correlated to the independence of the Kingdom of Belgium in 1830. Several approaches could be undertaken to complete this first attempt. On one hand, the study of the restoration work of the old collegiate Church Saint-Martin must be completed by an approach involving other materials of construction, themselves also abundantly documented by the historical and archaeological sources: lead, iron, softwood, etc. On the other hand, a comparative analysis of the major restoration projects in the province of Liege during the 19th century will make it easier to understand the strategies of the supply of construction materials and their evolution in a region and country which is in full industrial expansion.

Acknowledgements

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- [4] Ib
- [5] Ib
- M
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- [8] Ar
- [9] Ib
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- [14] A
- [15] Ib
- [16] Ib
- [17] Ib
- [18] Ib
- [19] Ib
- [20] Ib
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- [25] W
- [26] Ar
- [27] F
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- [28] Ar
- 18
- [29] Ar
- [30] Ar
- [31] Ib
- [32] Ib
- [33] Bu
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- [34] Ar

- [4] Ibid., files II.A.1 to II.A.11 (many mentions).
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- [52] Ibid., file VII.A.2, letters of February 11th, April 8th, May 26th and 27th, June 12th, August 1st, 5th, 8th, 14th and 27th 1845.
- [53] Ibid., file VII.A.2, receipts from January 12th to July 23rd 1845.
- [54] Ibid., file VII.A.2, note of April 22nd 1844.
- [55] Ibid., files II.A.11 and II.A.12, notes of February 12th, December 31st 1836, 1837, 1839, 1840, 1841 and 1842. These mentions concern supplies, deliveries and working days for the church and the presbytery.
- [56] Ibid., file VII.A.2, note of April 22nd 1844.
- [57] Ibid., file VII.A.2, note of April 22nd 1844; files II.A.12 and II.A.14, notes of June 15th, July 27th, August 24th, September 21st, October 19th, November 16th and December 14th 1844, January 11th, February 8th, March 8th, April 5th, May 3rd and 31st, June 28th, July 26th, August 30th, September 6th, October 2nd, 4th, 18th and 31st, November 15th and 29th, December 9th 1845.
- [58] Ibid., file II.A.12, note of May 15th 1844.
- [59] Ibid., files II.A.12 and II.A.14, notes of April 28th, June 15th and July 30th 1844; May 31st, June 7th, July 24th and August 23rd 1845.
- [60] Ibid., files II.A.12 et II.A.14 (many notes).
- [61] Ibid., file VII.A.3, letter of November 18th 1845.
- [62] Ibid., files II.A.12 et II.A.14 (many notes).
- [63] Ibid., file VII.A.3, letter of May 5th 1845.
- [64] Ibid., files II.A.12 and II.A.14, notes of May 1st, November 20th and December 31st 1844, December 23th and 31st 1845.
- [65] Ibid., file II.A.12, note of December 31st 1844.
- [66] Ibid., file II.A.14, note of November 2nd 1844; file II.A.15, note of September 6th 1845.
- [67] Ibid., file VII.A.2, note of April 22nd 1844.