

PARIS AT THE TIME OF THE FOUNDER (3/5)

In 1644 the area was open land; the Abbey had leased that year to a merchant grocer several acres of it on condition that he made two roads through it, to be called after St Maur and St Placid.

As you continue along the Rue de Sèvres towards St Sulpice's, you pass through the crossroads known as Croix Rouge (Red Cross): an abbot had a red-painted cross transferred there in 1514.

It was at no. 8 in the former Rue Saint-Maur that Fr Barré acquired the house that still stands, as the central training-house for his Sisters, who had now several schools in Paris, including one or two in the parish of Saint-Sulpice. Because of the street their training-house was in, they became known as the Sisters of St Maur.

St Germain Fair

The settlement that grew up around the abbey and in dependence on it became by the twelfth century a township administering its own justice and holding its own annual fair. It had long become one of the events of Paris life. It was held from February 3rd till Palm Sunday in a huge rectangular enclosure across the street from the north side of St Sulpice's. It contained 24 covered market halls, the passages in between being covered by a very high wooden framework. It was only a stone's throw from the Rue Princesse and was in full swing when the Brothers arrived that February 1688.

This was a high-class fair, offering silverwork and jewellery, objets d'art, lacquers, silks and porcelains from India and China,... Cafés, the boards of tightrope walkers and acrobats, groups of musicians and actors of comic opera added to the attraction. The ordinary people crowded in during the day, but the upper class preferred to come only at night, their carriages parked along all the nearby streets. For several hours elegant women and their escorts toured the stalls lit by thousands of candles, and getting away in their carriages in the bottleneck of the tiny streets took them into the early hours of the morning. Perhaps the tired Brothers slept through it all for the next few weeks. They could not but have known all about it, certainly from the boys they taught; some of whom would have had a field-day as pick-pockets.

St Sulpice

The church of Saint Sulpice that had been built in 1211 on the lines of the present St Severin's church, was being re-

placed by a new one, begun in 1646, as we have seen. But when La Salle saw it again in 1688 it was not much further advanced than in 1672, for the construction stopped in 1678 for lack of money and was not pursued till 1711. La Salle and the Brothers therefore only knew it as having a chancel and side-aisles, and it was not finally finished till 1788. The chancel was the only part in use, and people crowded into it for Mass.

On its northeastern corner is the small chapel of the Assumption with its curiously shaped roof; it was built for holding catechism sessions and was originally called the chapel of the Holy Child Jesus. St de La Salle often celebrated mass there for the Brothers and their pupils.

The seminary buildings were where the square and fountain in front of the church now are, with an interior garden on the south side, towards the Rue de Vaugirard.

Fashionable life in the area

Just across this road the Luxembourg Palace had been built for Catherine de Medici between 1615 and 1625, and enormous gardens had been carved out for it on what had been open ground. The Duchess of Guise owned it from 1672 to 1694, and then Louis XIV. The public were allowed to take walks in it.

The creation of a royal palace in the quarter meant that the great lords who served there found it convenient to build their great houses in the open spaces beyond it, along the Rue de Vaugirard and the Rue de Sèvres; they were built round secluded courtyards, presenting only the coach entrance to the street.

New religious and charitable institutions were founded also at this time, each in its spacious grounds. This developing quarter of St Germain also housed many high society foreigners who attended its horse-riding and fencing academies, and there were also many fashionable eating-places.

The cabaret in the 17th century was the equivalent of a restaurant; a "taverne" was a cheaper place where you could get wine and to which you brought your own food. But after 1698 the taverner could lay tables and sell cooked meats, and the tavern and cabaret now differed little. There were 1847 cabarets in Paris in 1670 and the number kept increasing. They were mostly in the suburbs. St Germain, the most elegant suburb of all, had 204 cabarets, some very high class.

Cafés, i.e. shops where ready-made coffee was sold, first appeared in 1669, and there were over 300 by 1715, providing also tea and chocolate, wine and liqueurs. They were numerous around the theatres, especially around the Comédie Française. This had moved into the area in 1688.

Many local people made a living hiring out carriages for foreign princes, lords and ambassadors. It was in the suburb of Saint-Germain that tennis (jeu de paume) in indoor courts, cards and billiards were most played. By the next century it was to become one of the favourite residential quarters of the aristocracy.

Brother Alfred Calcutt

PLAN OF THE CENTRE OF PARIS AS IT IS TODAY

