

# Cultural Heritage

## The Collegiate Church of Saint Martin

An edifice of major importance in the city and the diocese, the Saint Martin collegiate Church in Lorgues is one of the most interesting and imposing sacred monuments in the Var department. It owed its name to a dozen of canons who had lived there since 1421.

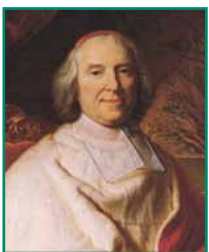


**W**hen reached from the south, there it stands majestic in this natural amphitheatre so characteristic of the site occupied by Lorgues. Whereas churches used to be orientated east-west, facing Jerusalem, this one was erected along a north-south axis. 56m long, 31m wide and 22m high, one can walk in through one of its stately front doorways facing north. Freestones were used for the corner ties, the cornices and the string courses of the bell tower but the walls and the vault are made of coated rubble stones. The edifice is covered mainly with curved tiles and lead was used for the bell tower.

very expensive achievement was to be financed in equal shares by the Lorgues inhabitants (thanks to the reduction of debts and the income of fines) by the college of dons, the main users of the church, and the archbishop of the diocese.

In 1704, today's site was chosen after the arbitration of the archbishop of Fréjus, His Grace de Fleury, (1653-1743, the future private tutor of the Dauphin Louis XV, and later an outstanding minister). The north-south orientation was chosen with the doorways facing the town. The chapel of Notre Dame de Beauvoir, the former Saint Jacques hospital, the presbytery and a block of houses belonging to three families had to be pulled down. The application of a famous architect of Aix en Provence, Thomas Veyrier, was first accepted, which allowed the laying of the first stone by His Grace de Fleury. Thomas Veyrier proceeded with the destruction of the houses on the site and the foundations but walked out on the project at the end of year 1705.

Joseph Pomet from Toulon took over but the building work remained problematic until the end in 1729.



Mgr de Fleury  
(1653-1743)

During the XVIIth century the Lorgues population amounted to 3600 people and Notre Dame de Beauvoir Chapel, a place of worship for four centuries could hardly accommodate half of the population at a time when religious fervour was very deep. That is why the building of a church or the extension of this chapel became a recurrent topic as early as 1633.

It is probably in 1696 that the ambitious decision was made by "a community council", (town council) whose rulings were given under the supervision of a first consul. This decision was also motivated by a strong desire to proclaim the sovereignty of Lorgues in the mid Var and this

Very soon difficulties, mainly financial, cropped up that required the voting of taxes and loans: as a result the work was stopped from 1706 to 1710. Moreover the competence of J. Pomet was questioned and appraisals were decided.

Nous remercions M. Christian Pelletier pour son aimable traduction.

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The 1709 winter -"the little Ice Age"- when wine froze on the tables of the Château de Versailles was very severe: the people were confronted to destitution and disasters in agriculture like the frost on the olive trees and pines in St Férréol. The 1707 war of succession in Spain along with the invasion of the Austrians was fatal to the region.

In 1711, the situation improved and Joseph Pomet signed a contract with the town in which he committed himself to finishing the job within six years.

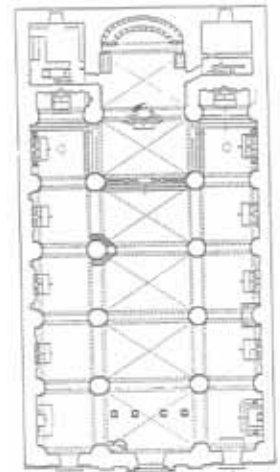
In 1712, the edifice emerged from ground and work proceeded when a new problem came up: the departure of His Grace de Fleury for Versailles in 1715 where he was appointed private tutor to Louis XV, the grandson of the Roi Soleil deceased that same year.

Financial arrangements were found but in 1717 the Lorgues inhabitants were confronted with new problems as they had to pay fiscal debts and the richest families were threatened by the seizure of their properties.

In 1717, work resumed thanks to the donations of the canons and the new bishop, His Grace de Castellane. In 1719, a loan from the community and the legacy of a former don, the abbot of Vintimille, gave a new start to the roofing works. The Great Plague of 1720 spared the Lorgues population but slowed down the work as the people used up their energy to assist the Toulon citizens who had been stricken hard by the

epidemic.

In 1723, the nave was completed at last when disagreements broke out between the project manager and the community. The four doors and the sixteen stained-glass windows were installed in 1728 and accounts were settled up with Mr Pomet. In 1729, the bishop gave his blessing to a brand new but unfurnished collegiate church.



This exceptional edifice which was achieved in the early days of the reign of Louis XV, the "beloved king" (1710-1774), is owed to the unrelenting determination and generosity combined with the thirty year dedication of the inhabitants of Lorgues



Photo : photogeovar.com