

The Legend of Our Lady

A Normandy legend passed down through the generations tells of young Lady Montfort thrown into the Risle with a stone chained round her neck, who was miraculously saved through the intercession of Our Lady.



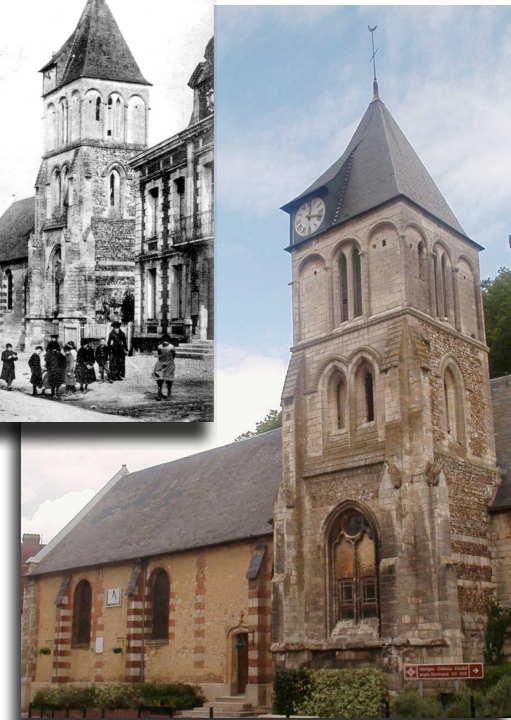
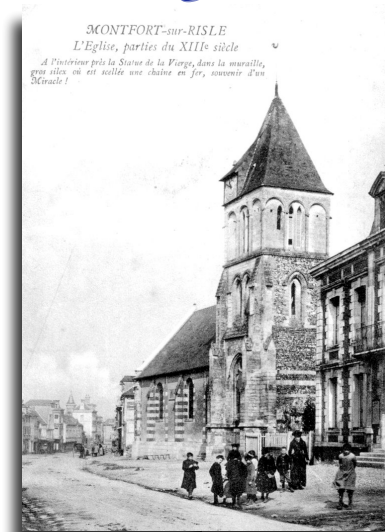
Our Lady of Montfort (Ex-Voto)

14th century wooden statue painted in the 19th century

Architecture

The tower shows some traces of the Romanesque style in its flint facing and in its four buttress' set two by two at each angle. It is joined to the church on the south side, next to the choir. The bell tower has three floors; the slate covered spire holds the belfry. On the ground floor a loophole, one metre high by ten centimetres wide, is blocked by an unusual arrangement of stones. On the first floor, there are double lancet openings typical of the Gothic style from the 13th century decorated with saw tooth edging. On the second floor there are two arched openings with large columns. The columns have projecting capitals. The belfry on the last floor holds three bells. The first bell, from 1744, was named "Marie-Claude-Suzanne-Pierre" by Madame Claude Suzanne du Fay de Maulévrier. The second, also from 1744, was named "Charlotte-Magdeleine" by Madame de Rupierre and came from the church at Glos-sur-Risle. The third from 1954 has the following inscription: "I was blessed by his Excellence Gaudron, the Bishop of Évreux and named Marie-Louise by the Countess de Levis de Mirepoix Princess of Robech and by Jean Neufville". The Choir is narrower than the nave and as such does not form a straight line with it. The triumphal arch is of the lancet type very tall and pointed. The Christ on the "poutre de gloire", a beam separating the choir from the nave, is in wrought iron and dates from the 18th century. The 16th century entrance is made up of a square door crowned by an arch with three stone mullions. The stained glass window above the door is from the 19th century and depicts several saints.

The Church of St Pierre at Montfort-sur-Risle



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History

Situated at the foot of the once powerful medieval castle, the church of Montfort-sur-Risle, dedicated to St Peter and St Paul, was given to the Abbey of le Bec Hellouin by Robert 1st, Lord of Montfort, in 1097.

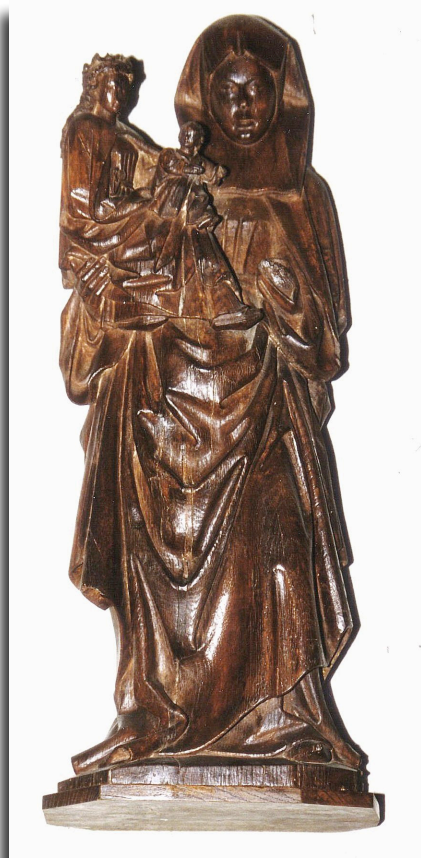
Although the church was first built at the end of the 11th century; today only a part of its chevet dates from that time.

The tower was modified in the 13th century and its flint facing is reminiscent of parts of the old medieval castle. The nave was partially rebuilt in the 18th century and bricks inserted into the stonework testify to the repairs that were undertaken.

Traces of an opening dating from the 12th century can be seen in the centre of the north wall of the nave. In 1562, the church was plundered and ransacked on several occasions during the wars of religion at the time of the Huguenot uprising.

In the immediate proximity of the church stood the chapel of Our Lady of Montfort. The chapel belonged to Louis 11th and Jeanne of France until 1553. In 1615 a religious community of Oratorian priests was established there followed by a community of Sisters of the Annunciation from Gisors in 1639.

The parish church was at that time in a very bad state of repair and religious services were no longer held there. However, after a long series of battles between the parish priest, the parishioners and the order of the Annunciation, it was decided, in 1771, to restore the church and to completely destroy the old chapel.



Sainte Anne,
a wooden
statue dating
from the
second half of
the 15th
century.

A detail from
the painting of
the birth of the
Virgin, dating
from the 16th
century.



The furnishings

The church furnishings are as diverse as they are rich. They are composed of a group of statues, paintings and retables. In the choir is a retable with pilasters made of painted wood and dating from the end of the 18th century. The central panel depicts the resurrection. The tabernacle decorated with balusters and alcoves is from the 17th century. On either side of the altar can be seen two large candelabra made of painted and gilded wood from the 18th century. Take some time to examine the three wooden statues of Saint Anne, Saint Mary Magdalene and Saint Martha, all dating from the 15th century. Also worth a look are the restored polychrome stone statue of the Virgin Mary, from the 18th century, which would have initially been placed outside the church, and the painting depicting the birth of the Virgin Mary, dated to the 16th century.

The painting shows the baby lying on the knees of a woman; a basin has been prepared for its bath as well as some swaddling clothes. Under a host of angels, Saint Anne is lying in a four-poster bed with servants at her side. Saint Joachim is watching over her from the foot of the bed. Six phylacteries accompany twelve elderly men symbolising the twelve ancient tribes of Israel.

Finally, take some time to study the statue of Our Lady of Montfort from the 14th century. It has the following interesting legend attached to it: "*Hugues, Lord of Montfort departed for the Holy Land leaving his wife, Alice, at home. When he came home, gossiping tongues told him that his wife had been unfaithful. Furious, he ordered that she should be thrown forthwith into the Risle with a stone chained around her neck. The lady took heaven as witness to her innocence and begged Our Lady to perform a miracle in her favour. Which was granted as the lady, the stone and the chain floated above the river*". In his repentance as an *ex-voto*, the Lord attached the miraculous stone and chain at the foot of the statue.