

THE ABBEY OF BEC IN NORMANDY

A series of disasters struck the Abbey of Bec over the centuries, sweeping away all traces of the earlier building. The romanesque church begun in 1073 and dedicated by Lanfranc was practically destroyed by fire in 1130. Trouble with shifting foundations affected the next building at the end of the 12th century and, although it was repaired, the whole abbey "was consumed by fire in most lamentable fashion" on 15th May 1263.

That was a natural disaster caused by the spread of flames from the village of Bec, where the parish church had been struck by lightning, but war damage during the Hundred Years War ruined the next set of buildings erected by the patient monks.

The St. Nicholas Tower, which today dominates the abbey, dates from the late 15th century repairs. Even then, very little was left from the period when Ruislip belonged to Bec.

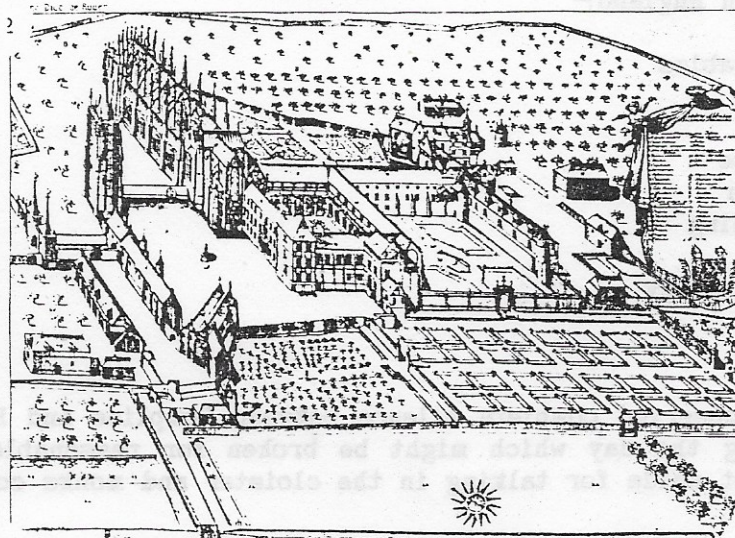
The monastery degenerated during the religious upheavals of the 16th century, but a revival from the middle of the 17th century onwards, provided most of the surviving buildings at Bec: the Abbots lodging, 1732 - 5; the refectory 1742 - 7 (now a church) and the dormitory.

The abbey church was finally destroyed in 1809 during the godless period following the French Revolution, when a stud farm was established there. In 1833 Bec became a branch of the Caen Cavalry Remount Depot and the refectory became a stable. It continued under the control of the War Ministry until after the Second World War.

After much agitation by civic and religious bodies, the abbey was leased to a Benedictine Community in 1948 and the long tradition of monastic life was restored.

Today, Bec is a thriving community of prayer, providing hospitality to all kinds of groups and especially promotes ecumenism.

Source: Guide Book "L'Abbaye du Bec - Hellouin"



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