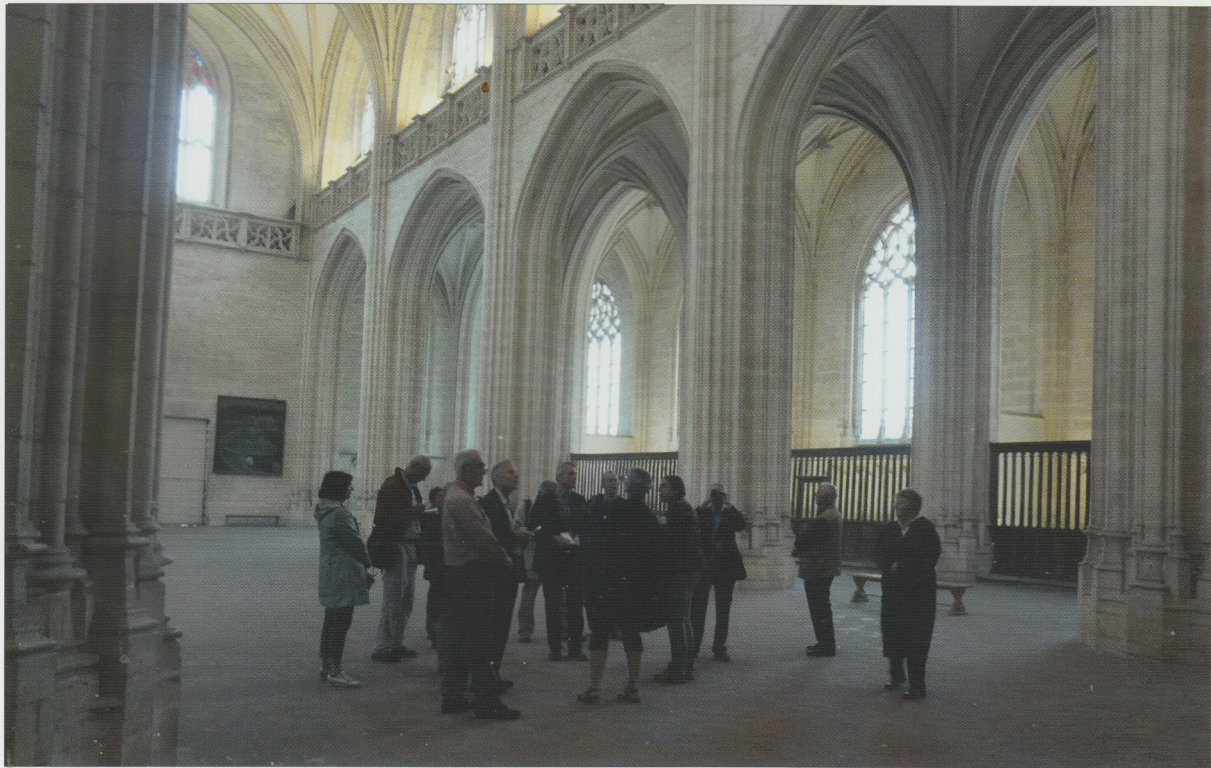


# Église de Brou, Bourg-en-Bresse

17 September

On the final day of our tour we visited the extraordinary Église de Brou, a church and monastery founded in 1506 by Margaret of Austria as a memorial to her young husband, Philibert the Handsome, Duke of Savoy, who died of a chill less than three years after they had married.

The group in the Eglise de Brou





**Altarpiece sculpture of the Visitation, Eglise de Brou**

Margaret (1480-1530) was descended from two ruling European families, Burgundy and Hapsburg; as a child she held the title of Queen of France and as an adult became Duchess of Savoy as well as Regent of the Netherlands.

Brou was a small priory near Bourg-en-Bresse in Savoy and it was here that Margaret laid the foundations for a church to house her late lord's body. She included tombs for Philibert's mother and herself, and built an enlarged monastery to ensure their souls would be prayed for in perpetuity. Margaret's duties as Regent kept her in the Netherlands for the rest of her

life, so she never saw the results of her work, which was completed soon after her death in 1530. It is a magnificent, grand and extravagant monument built by some of the finest masons, sculptors and craftsmen then available in the Netherlands and France.

The church is in the flamboyant gothic style, the nave with soaring, fluted columns, pointed arches and ribbed vaulting, flanked by chapels fronted by carved walnut screens and divided from the chancel by an ornately carved rood-screen. There are plain glass windows, and no pews, since there was no congregation, so the architecture is unencumbered, and the impression given is that of a 16th century Dutch church.

In contrast the chancel is very ornate, lined with carved oak choir stalls for the monks, in which the mannerist style of the Flemish carvers is clearly apparent. The three tombs are beyond, Philibert's in the centre, his mother to one side and Margaret's, the most elaborate, to the other. All are rich with flamboyant decorative carving and statuettes in alabaster and Carrara marble, Philibert's and Margaret's each showing two effigies, one as if asleep in full ducal robes and one below, the body dead, clothed in a shroud and awaiting resurrection. Surrounding the tombs are the chancel windows with stained glass armorial bearings and scenes of the Resurrection, all the work of Lyons glassmakers, beautifully coloured and of the highest quality.

In the monastery, laid out around three cloisters, there is now a small museum of fine and decorative arts, including some notable items of renaissance furniture from the Lyons region. The most remarkable was a late 16th-century walnut dresser comprising three cupboards formed into a trefoil, richly carved with strapwork, with fluted pilasters and a dentilled cornice and supported on a stand of four caryatids.

*David Dewing and Alison Lee*