



# EUROPEAN CHARTER OF CISTERCIAN ABBEYS AND SITES

## Over twenty years in the service of an exceptional heritage in the heart of Europe

Our association The «European Charter of Cistercian Abbeys and Sites» was founded a quarter of a century ago with the aim of sharing a large number of sites with a common heritage in our European home. Since its foundation, the Cistercian Order was distinguished by its willingness to return to the original vocation of monasticism, particularly in the tradition of the Desert Fathers, while implementing major innovations. This vision of the fathers of the order, was well adapted in the context of the time, and enabled the proliferation of new abbeys and the promoting the monasteries of other Orders throughout Europe during the two centuries that followed. Its originality was reflected both in its intellectual and spiritual dimensions and in its technical ingenuity and remarkable talent for organisation, planning and construction.

By virtue of its system of developing daughter houses, and its spiritual and economic success, Cistercian monasticism spread rapidly across all of Europe, including managing the territory between them with incredible efficiency. Thus, Cistercian heritage is not that of Champagne or Burgundy, but transcends local particularities to contribute a de facto measure of European cultural identity. It leaves behind a large and unique heritage as a testimony worthy of much study and research for present and future generations.

Our association brings together more than 200 Cistercian Abbeys or Sites from 11 European countries and of many differing natures. These include: Government bodies, religious communities, public authorities, institutions, private owners and local associations.

What unites us, beyond these differences, and the hundreds or even thousands of miles separating us throughout Europe, is the desire to preserve and enhance this heritage, to learn, and to promote the spirit of sharing and mutual support, with respect for the spirit of the place and the determination to pass these on to others.

These values that unite us, are expressed in our Charter values at the heart of this document.

**200 member abbeys  
11 European countries**



# A European network for the preservation and enhancement of the Cistercian heritage

*Shared values*

In Europe there is a considerable historical heritage of 750 abbeys for men and 1000 convents of nuns, created by the Cistercian Order between 1098 when it was founded in France in Cîteaux and the late eighteenth century, to which must be added the abbeys created from the nineteenth century onwards.

The “European Charter of Cistercian Abbeys and Sites” Association was officially inaugurated in 1993 at the behest of a few owners and managers of the abbeys who were aware of the need to organise mutual promotion, including the responsibility for the day-to-day preservation and enhancement of the tangible and intangible Cistercian heritage. The Association is independent and has no religious or political involvement.

The “European Charter of Cistercian Abbeys and Sites” Association is a framework for exchange and sharing to enable members to seize all opportunities for discernment and action to serve its objectives. The Association also aims to represent its members vis-à-vis third parties, at all levels, in order to defend and promote this heritage.

The Association is European. This European dimension naturally reflects Cistercian history, where there are special issues associated with the dynamics of a European culture.

Cistercian environments, created and disseminated throughout the European continent are connected through a living network, and which transcend natural borders, have contributed to the existence of a European cultural identity.

The “European Charter of Cistercian Abbeys and Sites” Association aims to improve the dissemination of this heritage, and to support and stimulate historical and archaeological research. Recognising that the long-term preservation of Cistercian heritage can only be effective if people appreciate and understand its value, the Association promotes it through education and publicity.

The “European Charter of Cistercian Abbeys and Sites” Association acts in the public interest and is a non-profit volunteer-based organisation. Its goals are fundamentally cultural, not excluding however the reality of the economic and environmental constraints, including those arising for some sites of intense tourist activity. The Association supports sustainable and well-informed cultural tourism.

The Association comprises a network of abbeys and sites that adhere to its Constitution and its Charter values. It is a focus for of solidarity and friendship among members, who are anxious to preserve and publicise their exceptional European heritage.



*An identity plaque marking the abbeys  
belonging to the Association*



# Charter of values

## Article 1. Preservation

*Preservation refers to the commitment to preserve and maintain the Cistercian tangible and intangible heritage.*

The “European Charter of Cistercian Abbeys and Sites” Association, and its members work to preserve the tangible and intangible Cistercian heritage. Their actions contribute to the preservation of their historical heritage both buildings and environment, regardless of its condition. They also aim to bring to promote to a wider audience, the role of the Cistercians in European history especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They aim to highlight the unique identity of Cistercian monasticism in its intellectual and spiritual dimensions, technical ingenuity and remarkable talent as an organiser, a builder and developer.

## Article 2. Development

*Commitment to promote the heritage vis-à-vis third parties for its preservation over the long term.*

The Association and the member sites help promote the Cistercian heritage, to publicise the exceptional richness of this heritage and to create the best conditions for its preservation over the long term. This valuation is multifaceted. It operates vis-à-vis the general public, not only when tourist promotions at a site are undertaken, but also by actions or public relations. This initiative is also aimed at authorities, institutions, private operators and various communities or Associations at the local, regional, national, European and international levels.

## Article 3. Cistercian Ethos

*Commitment to preserving the Cistercian ethos in areas where the sites have been redeveloped for other purposes.*

The Association is independent, and has no religious or political involvement, undertakes not to ignore the religious origin of the heritage, including the foundation of the Cistercian Order nine centuries ago. If subsequent use has led to the Cistercian space being used for things such as tourism, or housing, the Association and the member sites are careful not to overshadow or debase the original purpose, to enable visitors to appreciate these preserved areas in accordance with the original intention.

## Article 4. Education

*Commitment to initiate or support specific educational activities to inform the public on the issue of the preservation of this heritage.*

The Association and membership sites encourage everyone, especially young people, to appreciate Cistercian history and environment. Education is an essential factor in this, and may contribute to the sustainability of the unrestored sites. The Association and the member sites promote initiatives in this area, including specific events and sessions with teachers, and education and events of all kinds.

## Article 5. Search

*Commitment to collect and preserve all the best information, historical or other useful knowledge of the site.*

The Association supports the initiatives of its members, both individually and collectively, to collect and preserve the best information, historical, archaeological, literary, pictorial, or other data to benefit Cistercian collective knowledge and to create and nurture any research up to university level. The Association supports efforts to build databases, and to stimulate the use of appropriate technology for sharing these.

## Article 6. Exchange and Sharing

*Commitment to exchange and share knowledge and experience between member sites.*

The Association forms a Single European grouping of Cistercian sites, and is a privileged place for the sharing and exchange of knowledge and experience necessary to safeguard this heritage. It aims to facilitate and provide various meetings and initiatives to encourage all of the members in this direction.

## Article 7. Transmission

*Transmission represents the commitment to pass on to future generations, the Cistercian heritage and its environment in the best state of preservation.*

The Association and the member sites are aware that asset transfer is always a key moment in the history of historical sites and buildings. The Association ensures that the transmission of the Cistercian heritage, including both the historic buildings and environments, ensures the best conditions for its long-term preservation when ownership is transferred, whether by sale or donation.



# A Substantial Heritage

Cistercian Heritage is usually revealed by its buildings, more or less influenced by time, wars, fires, and political or religious strife. This monumental heritage arouses particular problems for decryption of these messages in stone for Man of the twenty-first century. In practice, we tend to interpret these constructions based on our contemporary knowledge and present culture.

Contrary to many misconceptions, the twelfth century was a time of renewal, rich and bubbling, where knowledge spread and the economy prospered. The Dark Ages were in the past, and the search for harmony, spirituality great innovation, and lead to a frenzy of new developments.

In these parts of Europe was born a culture that was both original and sophisticated, whose most visible element was manifested in the art of stone buildings. But this art of building does not appear from nowhere; it also relies also on an extremely rich heritage of traditions, notably based around Mediterranean culture, which developed even older heritage to reflect the newer vision of the world.

Cistercian buildings did not escape this reality, but fitted in with developments. Cistercian austerity in the early days of the Order, was marked by modest dimensions, and simplicity of design, to achieve an overall harmony where everything is interconnected and interdependent. This Cistercian environment is particularly noticeable in Europe. Trying to understand the meaning, is a way to preserve it and to integrate it into our own world.

# Services and Facilities

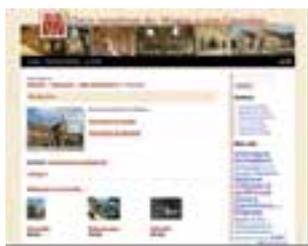
## ■ The cister.eu Website

The site is aimed at the general public.

It is written in French, German and English.

Several services are offered, and it will evolve according to needs and technologies. A mobile version is also available.

Information from the last Charter Bulletin is online on the homepage and archives are provided. The card system is a valuable tool when a visit is planned in a given region of Europe. All member abbeys are allowed to have their own websites



## ■ The Charter Bulletin



A newsletter in three languages - French, German and English - is published quarterly. It is open to members who wish to publish information about their activities

## ■ The Book: "Cistercian Sites in Europe"



The Charter has published a book of 200 pages featuring all Cistercian Abbeys and Sites which are members. A French IGN road map «Cistercian Abbeys in France» is published. It is sold in bookshops, and shops run by members. Projects to provide maps for other countries are in progress.

## ■ Introductory sessions

To meet the needs of visitors who wish to understand the spiritual, economic and political environment of the abbeys they are visiting, the Charter organises introductory courses, open to all members. These are particularly oriented towards guides and tour leaders.

These courses take place every two years in French at an active abbey, and are given by experts in history, archaeology and architecture. They attract around 50-60 participants.



A project internship in German is under development

## ■ Study Trips

The Charter offers its members visits to Cistercian Abbeys and Sites. These trips are offered each year especially after the Annual General Meeting.



## ■ The Annual General Meeting (AGM)

The Charter meets annually for its AGM, which is also an important time for sharing and networking between members.

These meetings are held in spring each year at a member abbey in Europe

## ■ Workshops

Members can exchange and share ideas and knowledge in Committees or Local Meetings to focus on specific topics of interest to a particular group of member abbeys.

Photo credits for the Charter: Valmagne (p. 1), Royaumont (p. 2), Noirlac (p. 2), Silvacane (p. 3)



**European Charter  
of Cistercian Abbeys  
and Sites**

Association de la loi de 1901  
Hostellerie des Dames de  
l'Abbaye de Clairvaux  
10310 Clairvaux - France

**www.cister.eu**

The portal of the European Cistercain Heritage

Telephone / FAX: + 33 (0)3 25 27 52 55  
Email: [info@cister.eu](mailto:info@cister.eu)



The Charter is described as  
"The European Route of Cistercian Abbeys",  
as part of the Cultural Routes of  
the Council of Europe