

The Blanques Crosses Alvimare

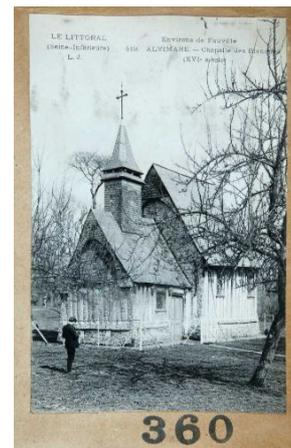
The Blanques estate was located in the hamlet of Alvimare, set on the fringes of Cléville. The name still exists as a topographical feature on maps to identify a chapel and the roadside crosses. It most likely derived from the deformation of the name of the local lord, Bellengel or Bennengel.

The Blanques estate was a full fief of *haubert*, that is under the direct authority of the king, and extended over the parishes of Aliquerville, Cléville and Foucart. The power of the family was principally underpinned by a feudal motte which can still be seen on the present estate, near a fortified house and the Blanques Chapel.



Napoleonic cadastral map, 1809. ADSM 3 P 3 – 13 © Département de la Seine-Maritime

The chapel was built in 1518 by Marie de Mauny and first dedicated to Saint Barbara and then later to Saint Anne. The estate passed to the Poullain de la Choltière family in 1537. More than a century later, Hélène Poullain enlarged the chapel by building the narthex. She also had an epitaph placed in the choir tracing the genealogy of the Lords of Blanques. The chapel, which is now privately owned, was listed as a Historic Monument by decree on 27th December 1974.



The Blanques Chapel, in front of a mound identified as the Lord Bellengel's feudal mound. © Département de la Seine-Maritime

The Blanques Chapel, taken by Abbot Paul Aubry, ADSM 6 Fi 96 © Département de la Seine-Maritime

The chapel is composed of a nave with a canted chevet, extended a century later by the narthex supporting a small slate bell tower with a tinterelle (small bell) dated 1667 and

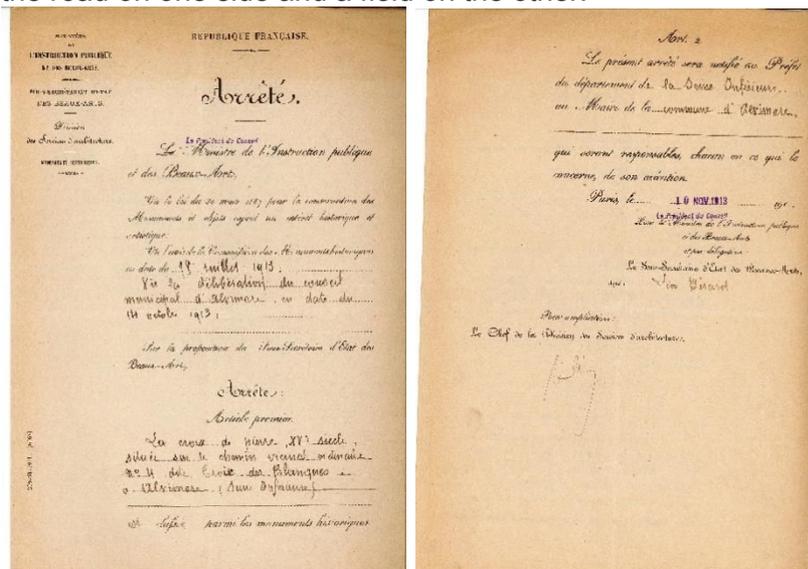
bearing the initials of the foundry owner, Jean Buret. The whole building retains a beautiful architectural coherence, standing on a stone footing with a half-timbered elevation and a vaulted roof resembling the hull of an overturned boat.

Identified as also belonging to the estate are two crosses, known as *les croix des Blanques*, which face each other across the road from Alvimare to Ecretteville-lès-Baons.



Les croix des Blanques, ADSM 6 Fi 10 359 © Département de la Seine-Maritime

The taller, older cross has been listed as a Historic Monument since 1913 and is flanked by the road on one side and a field on the other.



Decree detailing the highest cross as a listed monument. © Département de la Seine-Maritime

The triangular base is made of medium-sized stone masonry, with moulded corners and a flattened upper section. It stands on tapering steps. The shaft then rises to a great height, the whole measuring almost 9 metres, topped with a stone cross. Although the base is dated to the 15th century, the cross itself is a 19th-century replacement. The cross is also specifically oriented: the crosspiece shows Christ looking west; a passer-by looking back at him would have to turn his eyes to the east.



Detail of the highest and oldest cross: triangular base, summit cross.

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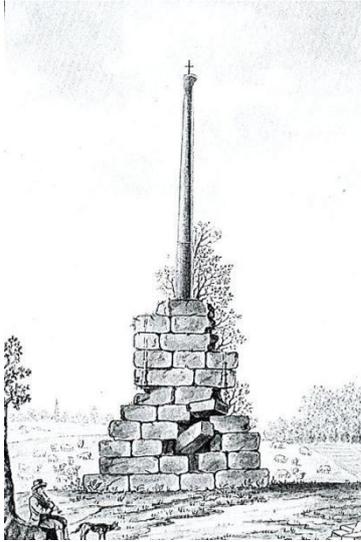
Architects and historians have pondered this massive, worked base question: is it the reuse of an unidentified architectural element? For the moment, there are no clues as to the reason either way.

On the other side of the road, the smaller cross, which is not listed as a historical monument, is set back from the road amid agricultural land. More modestly built, it has two quadrangular steps and a hexagonal-sectioned monolithic cross. Although Abbé Cochet described it as "modern", it may date from the 18th or early 19th century.



The more "modest" cross and its surroundings. © Département de la Seine-Maritime

According to Cochet, a first restoration was carried out by Baron d'Alvimare in 1842, although no other source attests to this. While the large cross belongs to the commune, the smaller one is on a farmer's land. In the 1960s, he wanted to give it to the commune, hoping that it would be moved to the church. It is, however, the dialogue and symmetry between these two crosses that make them of particular historical interest. And despite the approval of the prefect, the local council declined to move it.



La croix des Blanques in 1840, drawing by Lesage, published in the manuscripts of Louis-François Lesage (1762-1851) on Caudebec and its surroundings by Bruno Penna.. ADSM 944.25 PEN M

Restoration work was carried out by the municipality in 1977, and forty years later the area was landscaped.

Two crosses facing each other remain a mystery, and where there is a mystery, there is normally a legend.

The best-known legend is recounted by an A. Guilmeth (1838), who told that these crosses were built by the daughter of the Lord of Blanques, a certain Jehanne de Bellengues, who possessed 'a bewitching beauty'. Courted by both the Lord of Auzouville and the Lord of Auberbosc, she refused to choose either, and the two knights fought 'a furious duel' until they both lost their lives. The larger cross is said to be in memory of the Sieur d'Auzouville, whom the beautiful woman secretly preferred, and the other to that of his rival.

Another legend relates that these crosses were erected in memory of a French and an English soldier who died face to face during the Hundred Years' War. The highest cross is said to be in memory of the Frenchman.

But more likely, these crosses would indicate the limits of two parishes or two estates, most probably between the estates of Cléville and Blanques, whose rivalry is alluded to in the archive sources.

These crosses also marked a crossroads, which no longer exists today, between the road leading from the centre of Alvimare towards the place known as Blanques and the road from Caudebec to Fauville, as shown on the Napoleonic cadastral map of 1809.