Following in the tracks of the tradesmen’s guilds
The guilds played a predominant role in the old government of Strasbourg (14th to 18th centuries) and in the economic and social life of the City. Their presence can still be felt today. This trail gives you a chance to follow in their tracks;
A growing role in managing the City

The organisation of the crafts and trades into guilds occurred relatively late in Strasbourg. It would seem, actually, that they were formed in the 13th century. In the Middle Ages, each guild covered several crafts or trades and protected them against outside competition. Its role was also to regulate each craft or trade and settle any internal quarrels between the masters, journeymen and apprentices. Over the centuries, the guilds gradually gained a political, administrative and military role in the City and participated in public life.

In 1262, the City gained its independence from the bishop at the Battle of Hausbergen, a battle in which the trades and craftsmen took part armed with pikes, axes, etc. From then on, they grouped together and began to aspire to take part in the government of the City. The following year, the town obtained the agreement of the Burgraff (an episcopal functionary) to give each of the trade or crafts that he was in charge of, a master capable of passing on his skills.

In 1332, the corporations were growing in number and political weight and won 25 of the 50 seats on the council that ran the City. It was led by the first city officer, the Ammeister, who was taken from their ranks. Then from 1482 to the Revolution, the number of representatives of the guilds was fixed at 20.

The guilds took part in the City's defence and security, keeping watch at night and guard during the day. They protected the City in case of fire or riot, and above all from external attack. To do this, each member of the guild was obliged, according to his means, to possess some military equipment and to maintain it.

In modern times, the guilds abandoned their military attributions to concentrate their efforts on extending their political and economic prerogatives. They controlled the crafts and trade completely until the 18th century.

The "Poêle"

The masters met regularly in a house which served as the headquarters for the guild. This house would include a large main room heated by a stove, "poêle" in French or "stube" in German. The members came together in this room for meetings and festivities, and the masters took their meals there. Military equipment was stored there, along with the archives, banners, hanaps and seals, which would often be kept in a "boîte de maitrise" or master's chest.

The masters, journeymen and apprentices were led, within the guild, by the Zunftmeister. Elected by the masters for one year, he would decide disputes at the professional tribunal, monitored the quality of the goods produced, ran the guild's finances and ensured the guild ran smoothly.
Poêle of the Guild of Wine-growers  (21 rue Sainte-Barbe)

This Renaissance-style house, with decorated pilasters and half-timbering, was home to the Poêle of Wine-growers until the middle of the 16th century. This guild included wine-growers, wine traders, and rather more curiously, wig-makers. It was also known in French as the "corporation de gourmets", from the old French word "gourmet" (14th century), which meant "wine broker" (Weinsticher in German).

The emblem most often used by the wine-related trades remains the bunch of grapes and the vine. It can therefore be seen on the façade of the former Poêle as well as on the arch above the front door at 6, rue de l’Épine, an old wine bar called "À la Grenouille". Its sign, a large frog, is still in place, in a niche in the wall to the left of the front door. This former Poêle has been listed as a historic monument since 1929.

Poêle of the Guild of the Lantern  (18 rue du Vieux-Marché-aux-Grains)

This much altered building originally housed the Poêle de la Lanterne. This guild owes its name to its sign, which is now lost: a bear holding a lantern. It covered the trades related to the use of flour such as millers, starch makers, flour merchants, grain measurers, but also surgeons and barbers. The Ammeister, one of the leading city officers, would come to have lunch here on Sundays, accompanied by the city's musicians. Two stained glass windows which very probably decorated the Poêle de la Lanterne have survived.

The first one, dated 1604, shows the guild's coat of arms. The second, dated 1627, features the coat of arms of the aldermen of the Lantern, therefore illustrating the political role exercised by the guild's members.

These two stained glass windows are now in the collections of the Musée Historique.
Poêle of the Guild of the Mirror
(29 rue des Serruriers)

The rich merchants’ and traders’ guild set up its Poêle at this address. It took the name of the house "Zu dem Spiegel" ("at the Mirror"), the first mention of which dates back to 1367. The building was rebuilt in the 18th century. At ground floor level on the façade, there are mascarons with allusions to the four seasons, whilst those of the floor above illustrate the four continents. This façade and the Louis XV-style roof are listed historic monuments. The rear façade in the Rue Gutenberg, where you can see the "Tribu des marchands" (tribe of merchants) inscription, as well as the remains of the columns of the inner courtyard and neo-classical decorations, were built by Pierre-Michel d'Ixnard between 1782 and 1785. These were the last changes made to the building before the Revolution. The old concert hall known as the Salle Mozart (he played here in 1778) upstairs, with its Rocaïlle panelling, is also a listed historic monument.

Poêle of the Guild of Bakers
(22 rue des Serruriers)

This fine Renaissance house with a corner oriel window (1589) housed the first Poêle des Boulangers before being transformed into a pharmacy and then integrated into the house next door, now the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The bakers’ guild was the oldest in the city. Its existence was first recorded in 1264 and we know that the admission fee for new members was 12 sous. In 1471, the oil merchants also joined this guild. One of the guild’s main emblems is the pretzel ("bretzel" in Alsace), as you can see at 21, de la rue du Coin-Brûlé. It is also found on the guild’s seal: a rampant lion holding a pretzel.
Poêle of the Guild of the Moorish Woman
(7 rue du Vieux-Marché-aux-Poissons)

This building was the headquarters of the Corporation de la Mauresse which included some very varied crafts and trades: sellers of salted foods, of fruit, rope makers, cobbler, candle makers and even carters. The guild's coat of arms can still be seen on the façade. One theory is that the guild owes its name to the building's owner in the 16th century: Moerlin, which became deformed into "Moerin", meaning Moorish woman, "Mauresse" in French. The building has had a number of different uses: In 1760 it housed Strasbourg's first school of drawing, frequented by Jean-Baptiste Kléber and Jean-Frédéric Schall. A hall used for concerts and entertainments after the Revolution, on 7 April 1947 General de Gaulle founded his new party here, the RPF or Rassemblement du peuple français (alliance of the French people).

Œuvre Notre-Dame
(Place du Château)

The stone-cutters formed a lodge that was separate from the guilds and attached to the Œuvre Notre-Dame, the body in charge of the construction and maintenance of the Cathedral. This lodge was so renowned in the Middle Ages that in 1459 it was granted the title of Supreme Lodge of the Holy Roman Empire, and thereby precedence over all the other lodges in Germany. The Œuvre Notre-Dame house was built in two stages. The Gothic East wing of the building dates from 1347. It was completed in the 16th century by a Renaissance building with scrolled gables. On the ground floor, the original decoration of the 1582 meeting room has largely been conserved. A veritable museum of architecture, the Œuvre Notre-Dame has been enlarged by the reconstruction on its site of some old buildings demolished at the time of the Grande Percée at the beginning of the 20th century. This is the case of the galleries of the Cour des Maréchaux which form an ensemble of sculpted timbers in the cartilage style of very high quality, carved in 1657 for the former Poêle des Maréchaux, which was in the Grand-Rue.
Main door of the Poêle of the Guild of the Flower
(2 rue Rohan)

The Poêle of the Guild of Butchers, formed in 1322, was situated at no. 19, rue des Bouchers. The adjoining stables could accommodate up to 120 horses. The main door, built in 1722 in Louis XIV style, was dismantled at the time of the Grande Percée, which destroyed the building itself and re-assembled in Rue Rohan in 1953. It is decorated with a sculpted flower, the guild's emblem, whilst the pediment bears the guild's coat of arms (a butcher with a cleaver).

The butchers played an essential role in the city's economy: they supplied the town with live animals, which were then slaughtered and sold from 1586 onwards at the Grandes Boucheries. Strasbourg's inhabitants were even in the habit of entrusting their letters to the butchers, who travelled all over Europe. In 1789, the Guild of the Flower had 325 members.

Poêle of the Guild of the Anchor
(9 quai des Bateliers)

Formed in 1331, the Guild of Boatmen was based in Impasse de l’Ancre and Quai des Bateliers from 1398 to 1791. The current building dates from 1758. Its façade features a projection dressed with red sandstone; two angles decorate the building's pediment.

This is one of the rare examples where the Poêle's name is connected to the crafts and trades it covered: the boatmen and boat builders.

First in the order of precedence, the Anchor was a very powerful guild and very important for the city's prosperity as it had a monopoly of navigation on the Rhine between Strasbourg and Mainz until 1681.

Water jousts, illustrated in a painting exhibited in the Musée Historique, were organised opposite Saint-Guillaume's Church between the Anchor and the Poêle of the Guild of Fishermen. The Musée Historique also holds a stained glass window decorated with the coat of arms of the Corporation de l’Ancre.
The crafts and trades have always been essential to the development of Strasbourg, in particular thanks to the guilds, which, for a long time, played a major role in the organisation and supply of provisions to the town. Until the 13th century, they controlled the crafts and trades and their members completely, both politically and economically.

During the French Revolution, the Le Chapelier Law (1791) abolished the guilds to encourage competition and free enterprise. The privileges granted to the crafts and trades therefore disappeared.

But Alsace and Moselle would inherit from their time as part of Germany (1871-1918) the organisation of the crafts and trades that was still in place until the 30th November 2012*.

The guilds, free or obligatory, were reintroduced at that time, trade by trade. In 1919, the Chambre de Métiers d'Alsace (Chamber of Trades) would play an essential role in maintaining this local economic system which is unique in France.

Today the political angle has disappeared, but the desire to organise the crafts and trades in this form remains and is an integral part of the local economic identity. Places for exchanges and providing information, these professional bodies are also responsible for the transmission of know-how and skills and for ensuring the crafts and trades evolve and keep up to date with the economic situation and other changes, in particular in the context of their management of apprenticeships.

The Mayor of Strasbourg exercises supervisory authority over all the guilds of crafts and tradesmen with their headquarters in Strasbourg.

* Decision of the Constitutional Council declared the 30th November 2012 unconstitutional articles 100 f and 100 s paragraph 3 of the Local Code of professions, removing the obligatory aspect of guilds under local law.
List of the original guilds and their Poêle

- The Anchor (boatmen) 9 quai des Bateliers
- The Mirror (merchants) 29 rue des Serruriers
- The Flower (butchers) 2 rue Rohan (portail)
- The Freiburgers (café owners, brewers) Poêle no longer exists
- The Drapers Poêle no longer exists
- The Lantern (grain measurers) 18 rue du Vieux-Marché-aux-Grains
- The Moorish woman (rope makers, ...) 7 rue du Vieux-Marché-aux-Poissons
- The Stilt (Echasse) (goldsmiths, painters, printers, ...) 15 rue du Dôme
- The Bakers Poêle no longer exists
- The Furriers (Pelletiers) 10, rue des Grandes Arcades
- The Coopers Poêle no longer exists
- The Tanners Poêle no longer exists
- The Wine-growers 23 rue de la Nuée-Bleue
- The Tailors Poêle no longer exists
- The Marshals Poêle no longer exists
- The Cobblers (Cordonniers) 12 rue des Cordonniers
- The Fishermen (Pêcheurs) 13 quai des Bateliers
- The Carpenters Poêle no longer exists
- The Gardeners Poêle no longer exists
- The Masons (Maçons) 9 rue des Juifs
The Strasbourg guilds

1 > Poêle of the Guild of Wine Merchants and Wine-growers (21 rue Sainte-barbe)
2 > Poêle of the Guild of Wine Merchants and Wine-growers (18 rue du Vieux-Marché-aux-Grains)
3 > Poêle of the Guild of the Mirror (29 rue des Serruriers)
4 > Poêle of the Guild of Bakers (22 rue des Serruriers)
5 > Poêle of the Guild of the Moorish Woman (7 rue du Vieux-Marché-aux-Poissons)
6 > Oeuvre Notre-Dame (place du Château)
7 > Poêle of the Guild of the Flower (2 rue Rohan)
8 > Poêle of the Guild of the Anchor (9 quai des Bateliers)

Key:
- Start of the circuit
- Route of the visit
- Tram
- Places with a notice
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