



## **St. Johanns-Tor (Gate of St. John)**

The St. Johanns-Tor or the Gate of St. John was built after 1356. It originally formed part of the medieval fortifications erected after the great earthquake of 1356. By the time these were completed in 1398, they consisted of seven large gates, 40 towers, 42 battlements and approx. 1,200 merlons. Both the St. Johanns-Vorstadt, which until then had had its own fortifications, and the Commandery of the Order of St. John, from which the whole quarter derives its name, thereupon became part of the walled city of Basel, which had sufficient living space for 20,000 inhabitants. Not until 450 years later did it spill over into the surrounding countryside. The wall itself and the ditch in front of it continued beyond the St. Johanns-Tor down to the Rhine, where the Thomas Tower provided the last line of defence on the riverbanks. This tower was named after the statue of St. Thomas that once adorned its outermost corner.

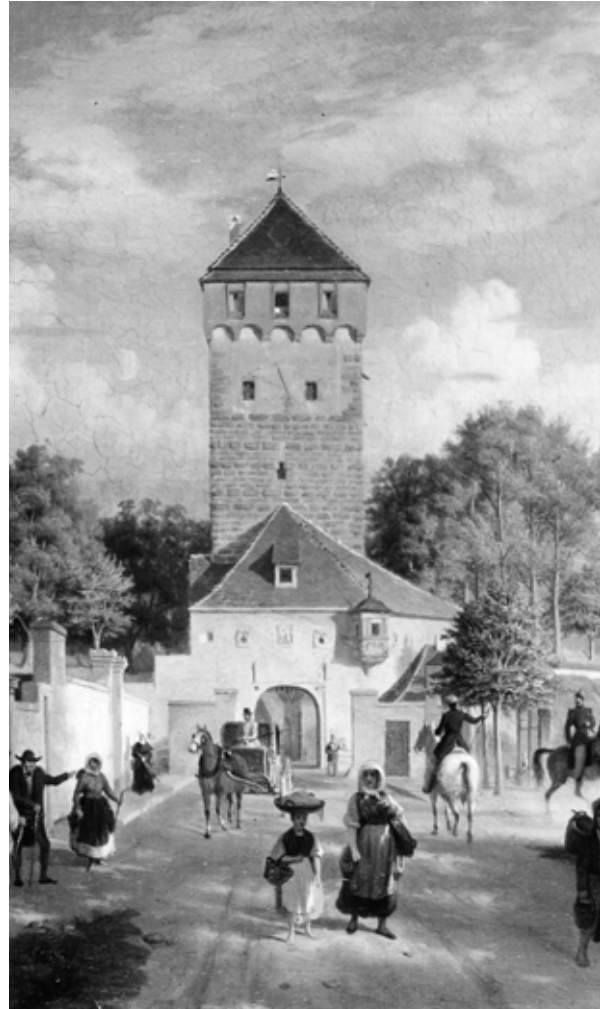
In 1473, with the Burgundian Wars in the offing, the St. Johanns-Tor, like the other city gates, was upgraded by the addition of a gatehouse. The decorative sculpture on its forward face, including the oriel, escutcheon and grimacing embrasures, was added in 1670. The grimacing faces visible on the gate today are simplified copies dating from 1921; the grimacing corbels that originally supported the oriel and the coat-of-arms executed in high relief are also replicas, even if the latter still bears the date 1670. The originals are now in the Historical Museum.

1577 saw the addition of a bulwark (to create a redoubt) and in 1583, the portcullis was replaced by a system of heavy oak beams that could be lowered individually, as it was on the Spalentor and on the St. Alban-Tor.

During the Thirty Years' War (1618–48), a bastion was added in front of the gate and the merlons removed from the top of the medieval wall. The wall between the Thomas Tower and the Petersplatz was shored up with an embankment that is now hidden underneath the green area between the St. Johanns-Tor and the Rhine. A narrow porch with vaulted archway was added on the city side of the gate in 1669.

1859 saw the passage of the Law on the Expansion of the City which resulted in the demolition of Basel's great outer wall, only a few remnants of which were left standing. Even then, however, some historically minded Basel residents called for the St. Johanns-Tor to be preserved and in 1874 succeeded in having it renovated. Ten years later, the redoubt was converted into a park, while in 1888, the Thomas Tower, which in 1806 had been reduced to half its original height, was fitted with new merlons.

When the gate was restored again in 1983–85, the steeply pitched roof that had been added in the nineteenth century was replaced by a squat, pyramidal structure



St. Johanns-Tor (Gate of St. John). Painting by Ludwig Adam Kelterborn, 1854 (detail).

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thought to be more in keeping with the original design. As much of the original substance as possible was retained, including the old wooden gate, the original beams inside the tower and the lower flight of the old, single-run staircase linking the four upper storeys. Fragments of the original wood panelling from 1356 were found inside the guardroom on the first floor, while the remainder of the interior is modern. The old guardhouse with its neo-Classical colonnade dates from 1807 and is thought to have been designed by Samuel Mäglin.