

L'Abbaye de la Bussière

The abbey, founded in 1130 at a place called Loiserelles on lands given to Etienne Harding by Garnier II de Sombernon, had been destroyed by fire in 1132; it was reconstructed not far from there on a piece of land crossed by the Arvo river. Work began in around 1140; the church was consecrated in 1172, but building work continued.

The majority of the monastic buildings remaining today date from the 13th century: the cellar, monks' refectory and east wing. This wing had encompassed the sacristy and the armarium, contemporaries of the church; at the beginning of the 13th century the sacristy was enlarged by adding a bay to the east then, in the 19th century, the ensemble made up of the sacristy and the armarium became a chapel, said to be that of the founders.

From the 13th century there also remains, to the west, a gateway for both carriages and pedestrians, a vestige of the former gatehouse. At the same period, the choir of the church was enlarged by adding one bay. In the 15th and 16th centuries, no doubt after the collapse of the northern part of the vaulted ceiling (never rebuilt), the upper floor of the cellar was adapted to accommodate the wine press there, necessitating the creation of an earthwork platform for access to it.

The existence of two abbatial dwellings (disappeared), one called "old" and the other "new", was referred to in 1559. In 1620, the chapel said to be that of the strangers was destroyed and replaced by the chapel of Saint Anne built to the north of the church, in the monastic cemetery, and which was to become the parish church in the 18th century.

In the 17th century a third abbatial dwelling was built, but has since disappeared. In 1683, the church was victim of a fire that destroyed the bell tower and a part of the vaulted ceiling, but spared the transept crossing. During the 18th century, the four front bays of the nave and the aisles were demolished. In 1793, the abbey was sold off as a national asset, excluding the church that had become the parish church in 1791, thereby replacing the chapel of Saint Anne that had become too old and dilapidated and was demolished in 1820.

One of those who acquired the abbey, having become sole proprietor, soon surrendered all of it to one of his creditors, Lieutenant General Jarjays. In the 19th century, before 1840, a part of the east wing (i.e. the chapter house and a part of the dormitory), the cloister, the abbatial dwelling, the kitchen, the guest accommodation and various outbuildings were demolished. In 1828, the water mill was reconstructed.

In 1856, Baron and Baroness Hély d'Oissel, inheritors of the abbey, restored the church. During the last quarter of the 19th century, their son, Léonce Hély d'Oissel, called upon the architect, Charles Suisse, to redevelop the buildings of the refectory and the monks' room in the neo-gothic style. A gallery was constructed to link the two buildings, as well as an external turret staircase (access to the former dormitory) and a wing at right angles (to the west of the refectory), housing a covered passage, a laundry-room and a room upstairs that was converted into a chapel in the 20th century.

In 1921, after the death of her husband and then her son, Thérèse, the daughter of Léonce Hély d'Oissel and wife of Pierre de Ségur (grandson of the famous Countess of Ségur), placed the buildings at the disposal of the local bishopric to turn them into a place for spiritual retreat: she kept for herself a house (constructed in the 19th century on the site of the west wing of the abbey), the circular dovecote and the grounds around the wine press.

In 1954, the buildings placed at the disposal of the bishopric were surrendered in full ownership to the Association of the Friends of La Bussière. In 1968, the attic space above the refectory building was partitioned in order to create bedrooms; to facilitate access to them a wooden staircase was built in the south-east bay of the refectory, involving the destruction of its vaulted ceiling.

In 2005, the buildings belonging to the association were sold by the bishopric to Mr and Mrs Cummings.

Source: website of the Ministry of Culture.