



...n d'entre eux, Maurice Cellier, a construit la maison conventuelle
trouvent aujourd'hui les services municipaux. Un autre, Sébastien
a terminé la construction et a assuré celle du palais abbatial,
maison de l'abbé, qui est aujourd'hui propriété privée. Les dates de 1
99, ...
... la vallée de la Loire.

A brief history of the Abbey

...ordre de Ste Genevieve à Paris qui repartit en 1652 l'abbaye, tombée en con
suis 1544, ...
... chanoines continuèrent à vivre richement, se préoccupant surtout d
nter leurs revenus, et les abbés ne firent que de courtes apparitions à St G
rtains même ne virent jamais leur abbaye, devenue un simple bénéfice. Pe
grands noms ont résonné sous ses voûtes : celui de Jean-Baptiste Lully, (1
87) troisième fils du musicien de Louis XIV, de Jacques Adhémar de G



...liothèque municipale s'installait dans ce qui avait été la salle de li
...gieux, si peu soucieux des devoirs imposés par leur ordre.

The Town Hall building, that we see nowadays, dates from the second half of the 17th century. But the Abbey itself is much older. Of Saint Augustin's order, it was founded in the 12th century by the Lord of Plessis-Macé who owned the land around Saint-Georges, on which a church stood, dependant upon the Abbey of Saint-Nicolas of Angers.

The powerful family of Plessis-Macé held no less than 22 parishes on its lands in Anjou, and to bring life to the young Abbey, they called the monks of the Abbey of Roë there, who then founded a first community, under the authority of Herbert, existing curate of the place. (About fifty years previously, the famous Robert d'Arbrissel, who gave life to Fontevrault, had left himself the Abbey of Roë.)

The Bishop of Angers, Raoul de Beaumont, who was also the cousin of Henri II Plantagenet, came to consecrate the new monastic foundations around 1180. Of course, the Abbey has known all the tumults of history. It was pillaged and burnt several times in the 15th century: first, on the occasion of the Truce of Tours, signed by Charles VII and Henry VI of England in 1444, then during the « Mad War » which opposed the troops of Charles VIII in 1486 and the great feudals of the Kingdom, such as François II of Brittany and Louis d'Orléans, future Louis XII.

At this time, the sinister « skimmers » (*écorcheurs*), soldiers then without activities and salaries, shed blood and devastated the country.

The 16th century saw the reconstruction, and above all, improvements of the buildings.

There remains the transformation of what had been an earlier worshipping place into a refectory, doted with a magnificent Renaissance fireplace with a straight mantelpiece which carries the date of 1573 and a name: that of the Abbot Antoine Millet, who ordered its construction.



Renaissance fireplace with a straight mantelpiece



Framework of the refectory in the shape of an upturned boat hull.
End of the 13th century.

It is only in the 17th century that the Abbey regains a certain splendour. At this time, the neighbouring castle of Serrant was purchased by a rich family, who were close to the french king - the Bautru family.

It is said that Molière's Bourgeois Gentilhomme was inspired by the libertine poet, the subtle diplomat Guillaume Bautru II.

His grandson, Nicolas Bautru de Vaubrun, was the Abbot of our Abbey from 1732 to 1746 and they profoundly modified and embellished the castle. Around the neighbouring countryside, some castle owners did the same. Consequently, at Saint-Georges, there lived all the builders, architects and sculptors necessary to carry out this sort of work.



One amongst them, a certain Maurice Cellier, built the monastery in which the municipal services are nowadays located. Another, called Sébastien Simonneau finished the former construction and undertook that of the Abbey palace, that is to say the Abbot's house, which today is private property. The dates of 1684 and 1691 which are engraved above each of the south and west doors, evoke these two building periods.

The two buildings proudly adorn the slope and offer their windows to the Loire Valley.



17th century staircase.
Listed

The order of Sainte Geneviève de Paris who took back the Abbey in 1658, which had fallen into «*commende*» (which is the attribution of a church benefit to a private person) since 1534, could not save it from the decadence of monkish traditions.

The canons (*chanoines*) continued to live sumptuously, above all pre-occupied with collecting their revenues, and the Abbots only made brief appearances in St Georges. Certain of them even never saw their Abbey, which became just a simple source of profit.

Nevertheless, the voices of great names have echoed under its vaults: those of Jean-Baptiste Lully, (1685-1687) the third son Louis XIV's musician, of Jacques Adhémar de Grignan (1654-1674), Bishop of Uzès, of Jean Louis Caton de Court (1695-1732), who ruined himself in order to have the abbatial palace built and then had to leave straight away.

Finally, because of a legal case against a local priest for the possession of a St Georges priory (the present Epinay priory) which was dependent on the Abbey, the great Jean Racine had the idea of writing the sole comedy among his works : « *Les Plaideurs* » (The litigants). Is it necessary to say that he lost the case ?

At the outbreak of the Revolution, imposing as it was, the Abbey sheltered only five canons (*chanoines*) who lived there very comfortably !

A cloister joined it to the Abbey church, which is not the one existing today, and which was completely destroyed. The buildings of the monastery were sold off to different purchasers.

In 1825, a new church was built, which allowed the main road to be widened. (It was then called *Route Royale*).

In 1959, the former monk's « *cellerie* » (place where a monk was in charge of the finances of the Abbey and of the provisions – bread, wine and beer essentially, and of course of the collecting of the taxes) became the present tax office. In 1970, the council services took possession of the former convent, and the local library was set up in what had been the clergy's billiard room, those who had been so laxist about the duties imposed by their order.



North frontage of the Abbey, which is the actual Town Hall

L'un d'entre eux, Maurice Cellier, a construit la maison conventuelle dans laquelle



Abbey's gardens

Enfin, à cause d'un procès l'opposant à un prêtre angevin pour la possession d'un prieuré saint-georgeois dépendant de l'abbaye, (le prieuré de l'Épinay) le grand Jean Racine eut l'idée d'écrire la seule comédie de son œuvre : les Plaideurs. Faut-il préciser qu'il avait perdu son procès ?

Lorsqu'éclata la Révolution, bien qu'importante, l'abbaye n'abritait que cinq chanoines qui y vivaient confortablement ! Un cloître la joignait à l'église abbatiale, qui n'est pas celle d'aujourd'hui, et qui fut détruite entièrement. Les bâtiments conventuels furent vendus à différents acquéreurs.

En 1825, on a construit une nouvelle église, ce qui a permis d'élargir la route nationale (Elle s'appelait alors Route royale.)

En 1959 l'ancienne cellerie des moines est devenue la perception, et en 1970 les services municipaux ont pris possession de l'ancien couvent, alors que la bibliothèque municipale s'installait dans ce qui avait été la salle de billard des religieux, si peu soucieux de leurs devoirs imposés par leur ordre.