



A-Z of the Communes in the Deux-Sèvres

Saint-Amand-sur-Sèvre *by Sue Burgess*

The commune of Saint-Amand-sur-Sèvre is found on the border with the Vendée, on the banks of the Sèvre Nantaise river, in a triangle between Les Herbiers, Cholet and Bressuire. The 1400 inhabitants of the commune are called the Saint Amantais and the Saint Amantaises. This spelling is certainly connected with the old names of the commune Amant in 1793 and Saint Amant in 1801.

As it was situated right in the heart of the *Vendée Militaire*, the commune was involved in all the great battles of the Vendée wars.

On 1st January 1973, Saint-Amand-sur-Sèvre joined together with the commune of Mauléon. It regained its independence in 1992.

In 2017, the commune was awarded a one-flower label 'une fleur' by the National Council of towns and villages decorated with flowers.

People were living in the area of Saint-Amand during prehistoric times. Numerous polished stone axes, arrowheads and other tools have been found at Chaligny, at l'Aumônerie.

Saint-Amand must have been inhabited during the Roman period as coins have been found. Christianity progressed rapidly in the area because at the end of the 5th century it was the birthplace of one of the greatest saints of the time: Saint Amand, Bishop of Maastricht.

Saint Amand was born on the 7th March 594 around Herbauges, that is to say in the area around where Les Herbiers is today. His father was Sérénus and his mother was Amantia. Legend tells us that Amand, who was admitted into a monastery on the île d'Yeu when he was little more than a child, after a short prayer, chased away a huge snake that was terrorising the locals and it was never seen again. Once back at Maastricht, Saint Armand continued his work founding monasteries and performing miracles. He died in 675. The parish took on the name of Saint Amand at his death. His parents had been rich and they probably owned the lands of La Guierche.

The building of the present church was begun in the 11th century. The prosperity of Saint-Amand-sur-Sèvre is shown by the foundation of three priories in the town. Le Bourg, La Giraudière and Saint-Lambert.

The priory of the centre, Le Bourg (La Guierche) became less important after 1565. Did it suffer during the Wars of Religion or was it because of the reforms brought in by the Concile of Trente? Around the end of the 18th century, the nuns left the priory.

The second priory was that of Saint Georges de la Giraudière, and also housed nuns. It is mentioned by Pouillé of Grand Gautier in 1300 and depended on the abbey of Saint-Sulpice-la-Forêt-les-Renne, part of the order of Saint Benoît. Some think that the priory was ruined during the Wars of Religion. During the revolution of 1789, the priory was sold after having been declared 'National Property'. On the 17th May 1781 the domain of La Giraudière was sold to Nicolas Maindron who had it taken away from him because he defaulted in the payment.

The third priory, that of Saint-Lambert, was founded in 1205 by Guillaume de Mauléon, the Lord of Mauléon. The monks left the priory for the same reasons the nuns left the other two and the priory was turned into a farm. Nothing remains of the priory today.

The commune of Saint-Amand was very active during the Vendée wars and 20 years later it was still possible to list 156 men who were still alive, and who had fought to defend their religion and the role of the catholic clergy.

A VOIR / MUST SEE

The present day church of Saint-Amand would seem to have been built in the 15th century. It was built where an earlier church had stood and of which the pillars at the entrance to the left transept have been conserved. By 1868 the population had outgrown the church and it was enlarged.

The left transept houses a painted wooden statue of the Virgin Mary with Jesus as a child. It was sculpted by Saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort whilst he was preaching at Saint-Amand in 1715.

Inside there is a sculpted wooden altarpiece which is a classified monument (it was restored in 1992 and 1993). Eight funeral stones of the lords of La Guierche, decorated with crowns and coats of arms, and covered with epitaphs can be found in the nave. They were moved in 1968 and inserted in the granite stonework behind the altar. There is also a statue of Père de Montfort.



Old postcard of Saint-Amand © geneanet.org

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