

Couvent des Cordeliers

La tradition rapporte que Guillaume Ier de Chauvigny, rentrant de croisade, ramena d'Italie, un proche de saint François d'Assise, frère Bonencontre.

Ce dernier aurait fondé en 1214, à Châteauroux, un couvent de religieux mendiants que l'on appelait cordeliers ou Frères mineurs. Nous savons de source sûre que l'établissement existait en 1250, qu'il prospéra très vite et compta jusqu'à 50 frères au XV^e siècle. Au XVI^e siècle, les protestants incendièrent les bâtiments et la Révolution acheva la ruine du couvent. L'édifice connut alors des fortunes diverses avant d'être restauré dans les années 1975-1978. En contrebas, les jardins en terrasse furent réaménagés et inaugurés en 1980. Le couvent des Cordeliers (M.H.) offre un exemple caractéristique d'architecture franciscaine du XIII^e siècle : l'église, dépouillée et austère, dotée d'un très beau portail, s'inscrit dans la lignée des constructions mendiantes ; elle forme avec les bâtiments conventuels un ensemble du XIII^e siècle unique en France. Si une grande partie des vitraux déposés en 1876 a disparu, la rose du Jugement dernier (XIII^e) a retrouvé sa place dans le chœur après bien des péripéties.

Tradition has it that, on his return from the Crusades, Guillaume I de Chauvigny brought Brother Bonencontre, a colleague of Saint Francis of Assisi, back with him. It is believed that it was Brother Bonencontre who, in 1214, founded a monastery in Châteauroux for the mendicant friars known as Cordeliers or Friars Minor. We know from reliable sources that the institution existed in 1250, that it quickly flourished, and that it was home to 50 friars in the 15th century. The buildings were set on fire by Protestants in the 16th century and then, in the 18th century, were left in ruins by the Revolution. The complex then experienced mixed fortunes until it was restored between 1975 and 1978. The terraced gardens below it were redesigned and opened to the public in 1980. The Cordeliers' monastery (listed as a Historic Monument) is a typical example of 13th-century Franciscan architecture : the bare and austere church with its beautiful doorway, is typical of mendicant buildings; along with the monastic buildings, it forms the only 13th-century complex of its kind in France. Although many of the stained-glass windows which were removed in 1876 were lost, the 13th-century rose window depicting the Last Judgement has been restored to the chancel after an eventful history.

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