

Castle of Valduc

Origin:

The abbey was founded in 1232.

Henry II, Duke of Brabant, had married a daughter of the Emperor Phillip of Souabe, and was disparate because he had no successor. He made a promise that should he be granted a son, he would build an abbey. A son was born and keeping his word, he built the Abbey of Valduc.

His daughter Margaret entered the new monastery with a group of 16 Belgian girls of noble birth. She became the second Abbess and was later known as « the blessed Margaret of Brabant ».

The name Valduc, Valley of the Duke, was given in honour of the Duke of Brabant.

Choice of the site:

The Duke of Brabant, who lived on Mont César in Louvain, tried to find within the land of his Duchy, a quiet valley, far from any town, in accordance with the precepts of St. Bernard. He chose a site near the village of Hamme-Mille, in the fold of the hillside protected from the north winds by the vast forest of Meerdael and close to a fresh water spring.

Choice of the Monastic Order:

Valduc is a Cistercian abbey. The Order of Citeaux which was set up on a return to the stricter rule of St. Benedict, between 1200 and 1240. There were forty five monasteries in our provinces, nine of which in Brabant.

The community of Valduc was submitted to the spiritual authority of the Abbey of Villers, which had to send priests for Mass, for confession and as councillors for the organisation of the Abbey, etc.

The Abbot of Villers himself regularly visited Valduc. Tradition was that St. Bernard of Clairvaux, great Benedictine personality, came to this place and that is why the hill opposite the Château is called Mont St. Bernard.

Work of the nuns:

Prayer, meditation, reading, training of the novices, copying of manuscripts, weaving, handwork, the up-keep of the vestry, teaching children, taking care of the poor and the sick, hospitality to visitors, the management of the farmland and of the clearing of the land, of the estate and buildings, running or supervising laundry service, the cobbler's shop, the bakery, the brewery, pigsty and sheep pen, the dairy, the stables and the farmyard, the bee hives, the orchards, the vegetable garden, the fish breeding ponds, the kitchens, the repair workshops, the reserves of corn, etc.

The importance of the Abbey:

Began with 16 nuns, during the period of its greatest prosperity the monastery has as many as 100 nuns. It went through many difficulties particularly during the troubles, disorders and the wars in the 14th and 16th centuries (requisitions, fires, devastation of the

crops, looting, etc.) sometimes forcing the nuns to hide underground or to flee through the forest to their refuge in Louvain.

The abbess was elected by the community, but nevertheless she had to have the agreement of the Sovereign and also of the Abbot of Villers, who then came to install her officially.

During the course of its history the abbey never ceased to keep in close contact with the rulers of the country and to integrate itself into the history of Brabant. It had frequent relations with the Court of Brabant as well as with the Court of Burgundy, and later with the Court of Spain and with that of Austria.

Among the most celebrated visitors who came and sometimes stayed at Valduc are:

- Margaret of York in 1481 (sister of Edward IV of England and widow of Charles the Bold of Burgundy), accompanied among others by Jacqueline de Croy on the occasion of the taking of the veil by Jacqueline Van de Velde, widow of a dignitary of the Court of Burgundy, and she herself a lady-in-waiting to Mary of Burgundy; Jacqueline Van de Velde attracted many gifts to the Abbey;
- Joanna the Mad of Spain in 1493 and her husband Philip the Fair of Burgundy, in 1504; Margaret of Austria in 1508, with her nephew the future Emperor Charles V, after whom the “rue du prince” in Hamme-Mille was named;
- Charles V made a second visit in 1525: the Emperor lunched at Valduc on 15th October on the occasion of a hunting party in the forest of Meerdael.

The remains of the Abbey:

- The natural surroundings and a few trees
- The old wall (1232)
- The kitchens, the stables, the barns, the coach houses, the dove-cot (last restoration in 1732)
- The farm: last restoration in 1773 by the architect Laurent Benoît Dewez
- The mill begun in 1431, completed in 1524 by a fulling-mill, restored in 1774 by the architect Laurent Benoît Dewez, and transformed into a residence since 1664. Important works were undertaken to change the course of the river in order to make the mill wheel turn; the “faux-ri” is the real bed of the river Nethen; a pond was dug near the new river as a water reserve, to assure the functioning of the wheel in case of drought.
- The pillory of Hamme (1680)
- The tombstone of the Abbess Alexandrine Van Dormael who died in 1787: the cross has been placed at the entrance of the church in Hamme-Mille.
- The wooden statues of the 18th century from the church of Valduc, decorate now the tabernacle of the parish church of Hamme-Mille.

Relationship between Valduc and Val Duchesse:

The abbey of Valduc was built in 1232 by Henry II Duke of Brabant as a thanksgiving for the birth of his son and successor, who later became Henry III Duke of Brabant.

Thirty years later, in 1262, Aleyde Duchess of Brabant, wife of Henry III, founded the Abbey of Val Duchesse in Auderghem.

The end of the Abbey of Valduc:

- In 1792, after the battle of Jemappes, the nuns left the Abbey for their refuge in Louvain.
- In 1793, after the battle of Neerwinden, they retraced their steps to the Abbey.
- In 1794, the revolutionaries returned and the nuns fled once more. Only the Abbess, dressed as a servant, remained in the Abbey; she was spared and the nuns returned.
- In 1795, the abbey was surrounded by the republicans.
- On September 21st 1796 the Convention ordered the suppression of the religious communities.
- In 1797 the community was dispersed and the Abbey disaffected after centuries of existence.
- On the 27th of February 1800, Valduc was sold by auction, in accordance with the law ordering the sale of national property. Barthelemy Wery of Brussels became the owner of Valduc. Several buildings were pulled down in particular the Abbey church and the cloisters situated between the farm and the present Château and were never rebuilt.
- The Notary Neefs of Louvain ancient trustee of the Abbey, then bought Valduc and re-sold it to:
 - Professor Desgranges of Louvain, who in turn sold it to:
 - M. Van Der Schrick, a lawyer.
 - The estate remained for three generations in this last family. It passed to the daughter and son-in-law of Mr. Van Der Schrick:
 - Pierre Craninx (1805-1890), professor of surgery at the University of Louvain and member of the Academy of Medicine; in 1967 he created, on the site of the old abbatial palace, the present Château by the architect Gerard van der Linden (Antwerp 1830-Louvain 1911), “Prix de Rome” professor of sculpture at the Academy of Louvain.
 - The son of Pierre Craninx, the Baron Oscar Craninx, who lived and died at Valduc, had no children, so the property passed on to his sister:
 - Baronne de Dieudonne de Corbeek-Over-Loo, who sold Valduc in 1919 to:
 - The Minister of State, Albert-Edouard Janssen;
 - After his death in 1966, his daughter inherited the property: widow of Count Plater-Zyberk, she married Count Grocholski.