

The Augustin Convent

The convent of the mendicant order of the Augustins is founded in the town at the end of the 13th century. It would seem to have been redesigned in the 16th century and towards 1525 the convent chapel welcomes the altar pieces attributed to Antoine Ronzen and Mathew of Anvers which are today in the parish church (see no.3 p.6) **The recurring conflicts between the Augustins and the parish clergy concerning burials, masses and the income they generated** as well as the deregulation of the monastic mores, provoke the closing of the convent on 15th May 1783. The Bishop of Glandèves proceeds to share their possessions between the seminary and the town hospital, but in 1793 their assets are declared national property and put up for sale. The gardens and orchards are sold rapidly. To the north the praetorium houses the Court of First Instance (see no.15 p.26) however the remaining convent buildings do not find a buyer. In 1822 the Sardinian engineer Romagnolo tries in vain to imagine a way of modifying the convent for the use of a Royal brigade of carabinieri, a tax office, a state school , stables.....However the chapel is split between various owners including Alexander Baréty who regroups the original plans and **safe- guards on the facade, elements of the coat of arms, the cross and mitre of the bishopric.** Part of the cellars opening on to the street house a bakery and oven before becoming the Augustin Gallery in 2012.

The Carémentrans or flour-dusted penitents

The Carémentrans are not to be confused with the White Penitents (see no.12 p 22) they are a parody of the latter parading through the streets the day before Lent carnival style. This was a means to « bury » carnival, a secular tradition typical of old tanning towns which took place every Ash Wednesday. Its origin dates to when leather workers were forbidden to take part in Mardi Gras processions because their animal masks had connotations which were far too pagan and demonic. These masks were so easy to obtain from the tanneries ! However their festivities were often, as in this instance, carried over to Ash Wednesday. The Carémentrans always parade draped in white cloth, their faces dusted with flour, although originally this was white myrtle (a tanning agent). They carry a white candle and pause only to bless their burlesque bishop to the the tune of « Frère Jacques ». The satirical figure of the bishop was created just after the Popular Front movement in a touch of provocation, nowadays much appeased.....