



Baugé

Petite Cité de Caractère®
de Maine-et-Loire

www.petitescitesdecaractere.com



Discovering
local heritage



Baugé

Town of the Good King René

Located at the crossroads of Anjou and Touraine, Baugé is first mentioned in the 11th century. However, megalithic remains attest to human presence on the Baugeois plateau since prehistoric times.

The name of the town might derive from *Baldgari*, meaning “the bold warrior,” or *Balbius*, “the stammerer.” Another possibility is that it comes from *bauge*, the den or lair of the wild boar, a creature abundant in the nearby Chandelais forest. This etymology seems all the more likely since the château built by King René was originally conceived as a hunting lodge.

The town experienced significant development in the 11th century under the leadership of Fulk III Nerra. Facing powerful Touraine neighbors, the Count of Anjou initiated a policy of fortifying the borderlands of Anjou by building strategic strongholds. The Baugeois region was truly a frontier zone, and the construction of a fortress at Baugé helped secure the eastern part of his domain. Fulk Nerra chose this location for its strategic topography: a rocky spur at the confluence of the Couasnon and Altrée rivers.



The Count of Anjou first built a motte-and-bailey castle, the foundational nucleus of what would become the town. Between the 11th and 14th centuries, another castle was erected but later destroyed by fire during the Hundred Years' War. A turning point in this conflict came with the Battle of Vieil-Baugé on March 22, 1421, when the English suffered their first defeat since 1415, at the hands of a Franco-Scottish army.

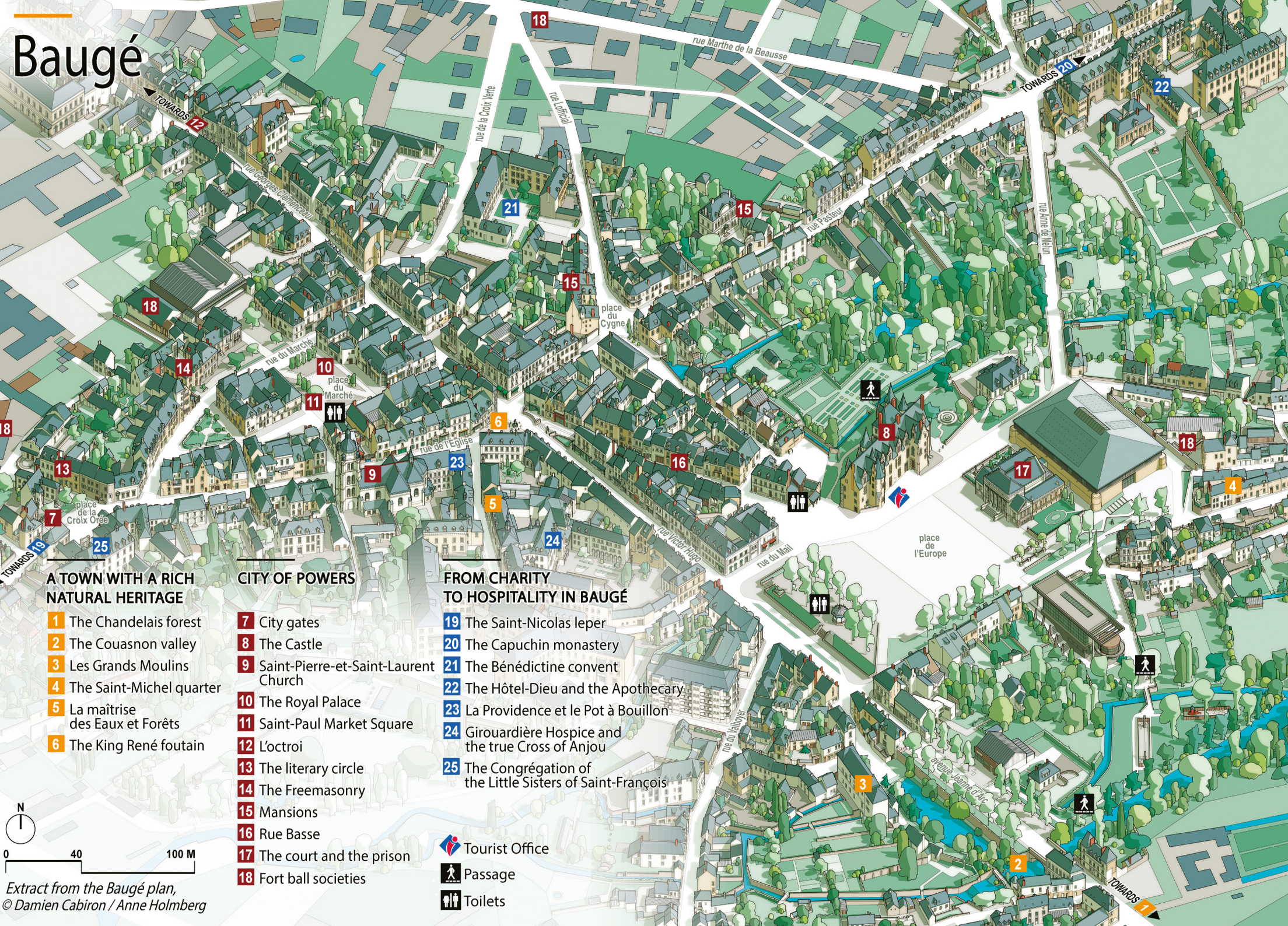
Upon the death of Yolande of Aragon, her son René of Anjou inherited the ruined fortress and decided to completely renovate and rebuild it. After his death, Anjou was annexed to the French crown, and in 1539, King Francis I authorized the fortification of the town. Baugé became one of the 32 walled towns of Anjou.

In the early modern era, Baugé emerged as an administrative hub and the seat of several jurisdictions. Nobility settled in the town, erecting numerous grand townhouses that still lend Baugé its stately character. During this period, several religious communities also established themselves, first the Capuchins, followed by the Benedictines and others, enhancing the town's reputation for hospitality. That same spirit of hospitality endures today, embodied by the 17th century Hôtel-Dieu.

In the 19th century, successive mayors undertook major urban redevelopment. As Baugé became a subprefecture, new thoroughfares were carved into the town, improving access and giving the city its present-day layout.



Baugé



A TOWN WITH A RICH NATURAL HERITAGE

- 1 The Chandelais forest
- 2 The Couasnon valley
- 3 Les Grands Moulins
- 4 The Saint-Michel quarter
- 5 La maîtrise des Eaux et Forêts
- 6 The King René fountain

CITY OF POWERS

- 7 City gates
- 8 The Castle
- 9 Saint-Pierre-et-Saint-Laurent Church
- 10 The Royal Palace
- 11 Saint-Paul Market Square
- 12 L'octroi
- 13 The literary circle
- 14 The Freemasonry
- 15 Mansions
- 16 Rue Basse
- 17 The court and the prison
- 18 Fort ball societies

FROM CHARITY TO HOSPITALITY IN BAUGÉ

- 19 The Saint-Nicolas leper
- 20 The Capuchin monastery
- 21 The Bénédictine convent
- 22 The Hôtel-Dieu and the Apothecary
- 23 La Providence et le Pot à Bouillon
- 24 Girouardière Hospice and the true Cross of Anjou
- 25 The Congrégation of the Little Sisters of Saint-François



Tourist Office



Passage



Toilets



0 40 100 M

Extract from the Baugé plan,
© Damien Cabiron / Anne Holmberg



1



2a



2b

1. The King René crossroads, in the Chandelais forest /
 2a. Washhouse on the Couasnon, postcard, 20th century / 2b. The riverbanks of the Couasnon, 1900s

A town with a rich natural heritage

Nestled at the edge of the vast Chandelais forest, Baugé flourished within a landscape of remarkable natural wealth. Perched on its plateau, the town overlooks the Couasnon and Altrée rivers, waterways that helped shape its development and enabled the establishment of numerous watermills.

1 The Chandelais forest

The most remarkable forest massif in Anjou, Chandelais boasts a variety of ecosystems, from ponds and wooded heaths to wetlands and bat-inhabited caves. A sanctuary for wildlife, it was once King René's favored hunting ground. Exploited for centuries, its timber was used in shipbuilding, framework construction, and cooperage.

The history of the forest is deeply entwined with that of the local people, whose livelihoods often depended on it: woodcutters, clog-makers, coopers, and sawyers all left their mark on the landscape. Today, the forest is managed by the French National Forests Office.

2 The Couasnon valley

Baugé's strategic placement above the Couasnon Valley and the Altrée river contributed greatly to its growth, both economically and environmentally. Just below the castle, the Couasnon is joined by the Altrée, although



2c. Rue Valboyer, in the early 1920s. On the left, the former Bellœuvre tannery / **3a.** Les Grands Moulins, early 20th century / **3b.** The Altrée, rue de la Chaussée

one of its arms is now hidden beneath a 53 meter long underground canal built in the 19th century. Previously, this same channel powered a mill before flowing beneath the town's ancient houses. The Couasnon itself played a vital role in Baugé's economy. On Rue Valboyer, a tannery was built in 1820 on the riverbank, employing ten workers by 1880 (**2c**). Two fords once allowed crossing before they were replaced by wooden, and later stone bridges. The riverbanks served as gathering spots for washerwomen and fishermen alike.

3 Les Grands Moulins

Standing beside the Couasnon's holding basin, Les Grands Moulins (**3a**) were rebuilt in the 19th century to replace the earlier Sainte-Marie Mill, originally donated in the early 11th century by the wife of Fulk Nerra to the Abbey of Notre-Dame du Ronceray in Angers.

Les Grands Moulins subsequently passed into the hands of the Dukes of Anjou and then the Kings of France. Initially powered by the Couasnon's flowing water, the mill was modernized in the 19th century with a steam engine and later a turbine. In living memory, Baugeois townsfolk still recall the hardy millers, like Pierre Fillion, known as "Flour," or Lucien Pironneau, who tirelessly carried heavy sacks of flour day in and day out.



4. The Saint-Michel quarter / 5. Cour Mercier porch, rue de la Girouardière / 6. Children in front of the fountain after school, ca. 1906.

4 The Saint-Michel quarter

One of the town's oldest districts, Saint-Michel borders the Couasnon river. The damp conditions made it ideal for wool-carders and weavers, who worked in the cellars of the quarter's narrow, modest homes, so different from the grand townhouses elsewhere in Baugé. One of these workshops remained active until the eve of World War II, located in the cellar of number 6, Rue Boileau.

5 La maîtrise des Eaux et Forêts

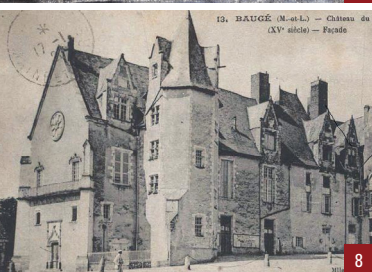
A testament to Baugé's symbiosis with nature, forest wardens are recorded in the town as early as the 12th century. By the late 13th century, a formal jurisdiction for Water and Forests (La maîtrise des Eaux et Forêts) was instituted across the kingdom to oversee the stewardship and regulation of royal forests. These courts wielded significant authority over forestry, hunting, fishing, and water governance. In Baugé, Samuel Panchèvre served as Master of Water and Forests from 1602 to 1639. He built the ornate gateway of the Cour Mercier (5).

6 The King René fountain

In 1862, the municipality erected a monumental fountain atop an ancient well. A stone stele crowns the basin, carved on all four sides with symbolic imagery: the profile of King René, a wild boar, a pheasant, and a lyre. The structure also featured a balancing pump, which remained in use until 1937.



7a



8



7b

7a. The Saint-Nicolas gate, 1844 / 7b. The Saint-Nicolas gate, today / 8. The castle, 1920

City of powers

Once a fortified town and home of several jurisdictions, Baugé holds the marks of administrative and noble authority. Its many sites of governance, remarkable for a town of this size, shows its historical importance. Over the centuries, both nobility and a rising bourgeoisie took root here, shaping its civic and commercial life through imposing residences and vibrant marketplaces.

7 City gates

Between 1539 and 1585, following royal authorization by King Francis I, Baugé was enclosed with defensive walls. The town was girded with 1,290 meters of ramparts and 15 watchtowers, accessed through four fortified gates. Today, only 400 meters of these fortifications remain, along with nine towers and the Saint-Nicolas Gate, its upper portion was destroyed in 1846 (7a).

8 The Castle

When René of Anjou took possession of Baugé in 1442, peace had returned and the region was undergoing reconstruction. Finding the castle in ruins, he began rebuilding it as a hunting lodge. The workforce was mainly local, using nearby materials: sandstone rubble and tuffeau stone. Upon René's death in 1480, Anjou was annexed to the Crown, and Baugé along with its castle fell into the hands of private leaseholders who collected



9a. The calvary on the north façade / 9b. The organ from 1642 / 10. Market Square, 20th century

its revenues. Maintenance was neglected, and by 1790, the building had fallen into severe disrepair. Sixteen years later, the town took ownership and repurposed it to the town hall and a gendarmerie barracks. Restoration efforts were undertaken throughout the 19th century.

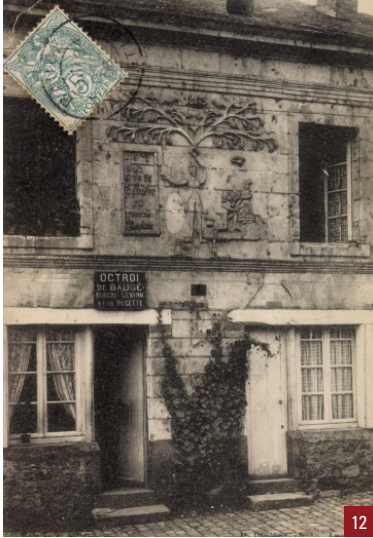
9 Saint-Pierre-et-Saint-Laurent Church

Built in 1593 on the site of the former Saint-Pierre Chapel, this church replaced the dilapidated Saint-Laurent Church located within the château walls. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, it underwent substantial enrichment and expansion: a bell tower was added, the forecourt was developed, the interior redesigned, and a calvary affixed to the northern façade. Within its walls, the church houses a magnificent organ dating from 1642 (9b).

10 The Royal Palace

Historically an administrative and economic hub, the Royal Palace complex once housed the town's covered market, courthouse, and prisons. After English troops destroyed the original hall in 1436, King René rebuilt it in 1466, incorporating it into the ground floor of the palace.

The upper level hosted the corps de ville, the precursor to the municipal council, and royal courts. Nearby, the prisons detained thieves and contraband salt traders. The square outside bore permanent fixtures of justice: a gallows and pillory, used for public executions and floggings on market days to serve as deterrents.



11. The Grand Veneur Lodge roof / 12. Sculpture representing the master of the house as the trunk of a tree whose branches represent his descendants, 20th century / 13. The Place du Marché, 1900s

11 Saint-Paul Market Square

Known also as the Wheat Market Square, this lively marketplace has animated Mondays in Baugé since the Middle Ages. One local recalled that “many farmers came to sell their produce... some took the opportunity to handle administrative matters at the subprefecture... or consult a doctor or veterinarian.” Merchant houses and noble residences surrounded the square, including the Grand Veneur Lodge, built in the 15th century for the officer responsible for the royal falconry (11).

12 L’octroi (city toll gate)

Baugé once had several octrois, custom houses at the town’s entrances where taxes were levied on transported goods. These tolls provided a vital source of income for the town. In 1843, a building known as the « House of the Supreme Being » was constructed to serve as the central office for these duties (12). Widely resented, the octroi was abolished only after World War I.

13 The Literary Circle

Prominent citizens and court officials in Baugé found common ground in their love of ideas and entertainment. Two societies existed, the Grande and the Petite, imbued with Enlightenment ideals. In 1847, the Grande Société evolved into the Cercle Littéraire, a club made “for bringing together distinguished minds to read the newspapers and engage in leisure activities.”



14



15



16

14. Latin inscription « Non revelanda svnt consilia » / 15. Colas Mansion / 16. Rue Basse and rue Victor-Hugo, 1909

14 The Freemasonry

The presence of aristocracy in Baugé fostered the formation of a Masonic lodge prior to the Revolution. Named *L'Union des Sentiments*, the lodge held meetings in a residence on Market Square, which still bears the Latin inscription *non revelanda svnt consilia* « our deliberations must remain secret » (14). Deemed too aristocratic by revolutionaries, the lodge was later dissolved.

15 Mansions

Every building in Baugé seems to echo its legacy of power. Many influential figures resided in townhouses that still stand today. The Colas Mansion, for instance, is named after a family of royal counselors. Jean Colas, who died in 1672, served as Chief Criminal Lieutenant at the local court. By 1780, the mansion belonged to Louis de la Nivardière, a royal tax collector.

16 Rue Basse

For eight centuries, Rue Basse served as Baugé's main artery. It hosted key establishments such as the Auberge de l'Écu, built in 1615, the town's largest inn and a postal relay until 1870. The inn's renown was such that, by the 19th century, the street was called « Rue Basse-de-l'Écu ». However, the creation of Rue Royale (now Rue Victor Hugo) diverted traffic, and the narrowness of Rue Basse soon hindered carriages and wagons. Urban modernization, including improved infrastructure and water distribution, followed.



17a



17b



18

17a. Statue representing Justice / 17b. The old prison /
18. Fort ball players « Le Cercle du Progrès »

17 The court and the prison

In 1859, the construction of a new judicial center was decided to replace the Royal Palace. The imposing façade is flanked by two statues representing Justice (17a) and Law, created by the sculptor Adolphe David, born in Baugé in 1828. Behind the courthouse, the prison came into service in 1864. Closed in 1935, it was reopened in 1942 and used during the Liberation to detain political prisoners and collaborators. It was permanently closed in 1952.

18 Fort ball societies

Recognized as a “heritage game of the Loire Valley” by the French Ministry of Culture, fort ball (boule de fort) originated in the 16th century. According to popular tradition, it was invented by the riverboatmen, who played it in the curved holds of their boats. The game is played between two teams who try to roll their weighted balls as close as possible to a smaller target ball called the maître (or jack). The balls are weighted on one side, called the “strong side”, which causes them to roll in an unpredictable curve, making the game particularly challenging. The playing surface itself is shaped like a shallow gutter, further complicating the trajectory. Baugé is home to four fort ball societies: the Cercle du Progrès, the Cercle Saint-Laurent, Les Artisans, and the Union Baugeoise.



19



21

19. Rue Saint-Nicolas, early 20th century / 21. The Benedictine convent

From charity to hospitality in Baugé

Throughout its history, the people of Baugé have demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting the most vulnerable members of society. The town's identity is deeply shaped by its many charitable institutions and the women who devoted their lives to these causes. This enduring tradition of care is still visible in the architecture of the town and lives on through its civic spirit today.

19 The Saint-Nicolas leper

The Saint-Nicolas district owes its name to the chapel of the leper hospital built in the 12th century, a time when leprosy was spreading throughout Europe. The facility likely did not offer treatment but instead served to isolate the sick around the chapel, thereby limiting contagion. In the late 19th century, parts of the chapel were converted into housing, during which skeletons, standing upright in niches, were unearthed.

20 The Capuchin monastery

The Capuchins were the first religious community to settle in Baugé, arriving in 1597. They established themselves outside the town walls, on the site of the old Saint-Sulpice Church. In 1611, the Bishop of Rennes blessed the monastery, then home to fifteen friars. At the time of its dissolution in 1791, only three remained.



22a



Photo Bayss-Bonnaure, Angers

M^{lle} DE MELUN, PRINCESSE D'EPINOUY
Fondatrice de l'Hôtel-Dieu de Baugé

Pendant les guerres de la Fronde, en 1652, elle sauva cette ville du pillage en se faisant connaître au maréchal d'Hocquincourt qui fit défilier ses troupes devant elle en lui présentant les armes

22b

22a. Portrait of Marthe de la Beausse, late 18th century /

22b. Engraving of Anne de Melun, 17th century

21 The Benedictine convent

The Benedictine congregation of the Daughters of Calvary arrived in 1619. Founded in Poitiers by Father Joseph, the order played an important role in the education of local girls. Deeply indebted, the convent was dissolved in 1760 by the Bishop of Angers, although it still housed some thirty sisters. The remaining nuns were forced either to leave Baugé or join the Hospital Sisters of Saint Joseph to continue their educational mission.

22 The Hôtel-Dieu and the Apothecary

Founded in the mid-17th century by Marthe de la Beausse (22a), the Hôtel-Dieu owes its existence and operation to the initiative and dedication of several women. Its first buildings were constructed using stone from the old Saint-Laurent Church. Substantial donations from Anne de Melun (22b), a noblewoman from a prominent Flemish family, enabled the establishment's growth and the founding of an apothecary in 1675. Anne de Melun died in Baugé in 1679 and was buried in the hospital's crypt.

The monumental complex included patient wards, a central pavilion housing the kitchens and apothecary, a chapel (22c), and the convent buildings. The present-day Anne de Melun retirement home was originally the community's farm. The Marthe de la Beausse wing became a girls' boarding school in the late 18th century, replacing the Benedictines' earlier institution.

A neo-Gothic chapel, built in the 19th century, completed the ensemble, which was enclosed by perimeter walls.



22c. The Hôtel-Dieu chapel / **22d.** The Apothecary / **23.** Taillecourt House, home of the charity “du Pot à bouillon et de la Providence”

The Hospital Sisters of Saint Joseph ensured the hospital’s day-to-day operation. After 1760, the goods of the dissolved Benedictine community were transferred to the Hôtel-Dieu, enabling the construction of several houses in town, whose rental income supported the care of the sick. Today, the apothecary stands as one of the richest and oldest in France, housing a collection of over 650 ceramic jars, a remarkable testimony to early modern pharmacology (22d).

This room once stored all the remedies and raw materials needed for treating the sick. For three centuries, the apothecary sisters oversaw the preparation and administration of medicine, passing down their knowledge orally from one generation to the next.

23 The Providence and “Pot à Bouillon”

From 1685 to 1922, the Sisters of Providence devoted themselves to home visits for bedridden patients, to feeding the poor, and to providing free education for underprivileged children. They were assisted by laywomen volunteers who brought broth to the needy, earning the nickname *pot-à-bouillon* (“the broth pot”).



24a



24b



25

24a. The True Cross of Anjou / 24b. *Le pont volant*, built in 1812 to link the first hospice to its annex / 25. The sisters and Mlle de Hargues in the grounds of the Hôtel de Broc, 1943.

24 Girouardière Hospice and the True Cross of Anjou

The hospice was named after Anne de la Girouardière, whose generous donations made its foundation possible. Despite strong opposition from townspeople who feared the presence of the sick in their midst, Anne, with the support of Abbé Bérault, succeeded in establishing the institution. In 1790, she acquired a precious relic: a fragment of the True Cross of Christ, known as the True Cross of Anjou.

Brought back from the Holy Land by a Baugeois pilgrim, the relic came under the protection of Louis I of Anjou in the 14th century, becoming the emblem of his dynasty. In the 15th century, King René married Isabelle of Lorraine, and their grandson René II adopted the Cross of Anjou as the symbol of the Duchy of Lorraine. In the 20th century, General de Gaulle chose it as the emblem of Free France during the Resistance, renaming it the Cross of Liberation.

25 The Congregation of the Little Sisters of Saint-François

In 1891, three nuns arrived in Baugé at the invitation of Geneviève de Hargues, with the mission of « serving God and saving souls by caring for the sick ». As their numbers grew, Geneviève built a convent in 1894, extending her own home to accommodate them. During the First World War, she served as a nurse (25). Although she died in 1953, the sisters remained in Baugé until 1982 to continue their ministry of care.

Visitor Information

● Town Hall

Place de l'Europe - 49150 Baugé-en-Anjou
Tel. 02 41 84 12 12
mairie@baugeenanjou.fr
www.baugeenanjou.fr

● Anjou Vert Tourist Office

Castle of Baugé
Place de l'Europe - 49150 Baugé-en-Anjou
Tel. 02 41 89 18 07
tourisme@baugeoisvallee.fr
www.tourisme.baugeoisvallee.fr

To see and do

● Castle and Hôtel-Dieu

Visits from April 15 to November 1.
Tel. 02 41 84 00 74
contact@chateau-bauge.com
www.chateau-bauge.com

● The True Cross of Anjou, Girouardière chapel

Rue de la Girouardière - 49150 Baugé-en-Anjou
Tel. 02 41 89 75 49
accueil@congregation-girouardiere.fr
www.congregation-girouardiere.fr

www.petitescitesdecaractere.com

Texts :

Petites Cités de Caractère® des Pays de la Loire

Photo credits :

J.-P. Berlose - Petites Cités de Caractère®, RMN, Mairie de Baugé-en-Anjou, Inventaire général, ADAGP, ADML, S. Gaudard

Design and publication :

Design : Landeau Création Graphique

Publication : Petites Cités de Caractère® des Pays de la Loire

Town plan : Damien Cabiron & Anne Holmberg

Map : Jérôme Bulard

Printing : ITF Imprimeurs (2025)





Petites Cités de Caractère®

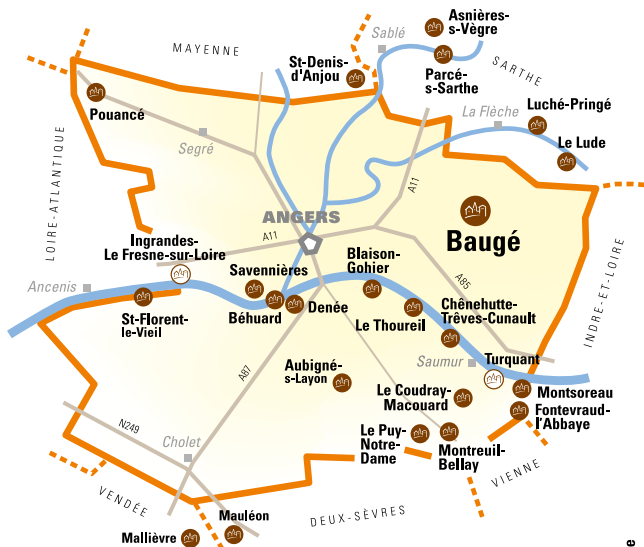
In accordance with precise and rigorous commitments made as to meet the requirements of a National quality charter, these little towns implement innovating ways to enhance their cultural heritage, the local animation and satisfy the public. They are happy to welcome you throughout the year and invite you to their best events and other cultural appointments.

You are invited, so please feel free to push the gates and let them take you on a journey to a certain "art de vivre" (lifestyle).

Find out more about them on
www.petitescitesdecaractere.com

MAINE-ET-LOIRE

Petites Cités de Caractère®
des Pays de la Loire



Petites Cités de Caractère®
du Maine-et-Loire

Tél. 06 59 15 04 21

maine-et-loire@petitescitesdecaractere-pdl.com

www.petitescitesdecaractere.com

Commune homologuée

Commune en cours d'homologation

