

Parish of Saint Anne les Menhirs

Church of Saint Martin at Le Bernard

According to Father Baudry, parish priest in the year 1860, recognized as a great scholar after his conversion to Christianity, Le Bernard was the seat of a deanery subordinate to Aizenay. It was not until the middle ages that the dean moved to Talmont under the protection of the dukes of Aquitaine.

The church, as it is known today, was built in the twelfth century and dedicated to Saint Martin, bishop of Tours, it houses the relics of Saint Yves venerated each year during an important pilgrimage.

In 1553 as priory, it became a dependence of the Augustinian abbey at Angles. The parish at this time had six priests and numbered between 600 and 800 parishioners.



In March 1568, Protestant reformers set fire to this church and to others situated in the area. All that remained after the furnace were the arches which had somehow resisted the flames. The end of the civil war and help proffered by Louis XIII after his passage in the south of Poitou permitted the reconstruction of the external walls, completed in 1629 as attested by the inscription over one of the side entrances. The interior restoration and the creation of five retables, or screens, were not completed until 1641. From 1858 onwards, a major restoration took place, the façade and the main entrance door were remodelled, a door created on the southern side to replace the original one situated on the northern side and the tiles of the roof were renewed. The bell tower was raised higher and tiled in slate in 1872. One hundred years later, a violent storm tore off the covering of the bell tower which was then replaced by ceramic tiling which exists as such nowadays.

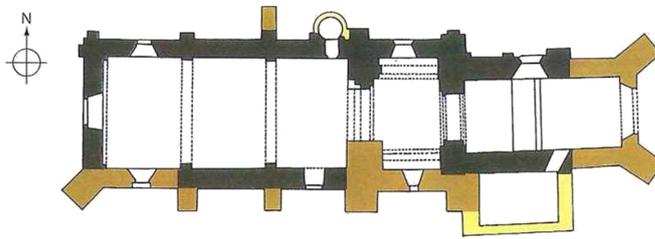
The church of Le Bernard is inscribed in the supplementary register of historical monuments since 1927. Saint Martin's church at Le Bernard is the only one situated in Vendée to have its five baroque - style retables (or screens) classified as "historical monuments".

A full restoration of the church took place from 2002, financed by the State, the region and the department of Vendée. Today the restoration is completed.

Dating of different areas

Legend

-  12th century construction
-  16th century construction
-  19th-20th century construction



During the months of July and August a weekly guided visit is organized.

Points of interest:

- Main-structure dating back to the Romanesque period, restructured between the 14th and 15th centuries.
- Buttress on the southern wall
- Opening of a Gothic window, apse with buttresses
- Sunken external floor, risen internal floor
- Double cupola in the chancel with modillions
- Principal retable with statues of Saint Hilary and Saint Augustine, also a painting representing Saint Martin on his death-bed.
- Stained-glass window representing Saint Martin as an army officer, a preacher and as a bishop.
- On the left, altar of the Virgin Mary, the statue of Our Lady of the Rosary is by the local artist Remaud from Luçon
- On the right, altar dedicated to Saint Madeleine, with a statue of Saint Therese of the child Jesus.
- Altar dedicated to Saint Yves, the retable dates back to 1641 and marks the end of the first period of restoration
- Altar dedicated to Saint Louis
- Pulpit, style Louis 15th, the sounding-board above it is missing
- 19th century Stations of the Cross created by a religious congregation from Chavagnes at Fontenay
- Stained-glass windows representing Saint John and Saint Catherine of Alexandria
- Statue of the Virgin Mary of Breuil dating back to the 13th century
- Treasures from different villages belonging to the parish (Avrillé, Jard sur Mer, le Bernard, Longeville sur mer, St Hilaire la Forêt and St Vincent sur Jard.)



