Hunston's Carmelites in Normandy, 1830-1871

The "English" Carmelite community were established for over 40 years at the re-purposed Hotel Sivard de Beaulieu in Valognes, near Cherbourg, Normandy. That was their last “permanent” home before they moved into their purpose-built Hunston convent, to become the Chichester Carmel.

I have impertinently and gratefully copy-and-pasted this article from the Clos du Cotentin project website:
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Post begins:

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Hotel Sivard de Beaulieu

On October 2, 1739 Laurent Antoine Sivard, lord of the Black Lands, bought for the sum of 20,000 pounds from Bernardin Morin, a property located in Valognes, called "the land of the Blackmares or Haut-Pirou". This property included a house with "kitchen, dining room, pantry, stable, press", and bedrooms and attics above. The deed of sale also specifies that the "large main building", covered with slate, was preceded by a courtyard with a porte-cochere and surrounded by a garden, an orchard and other pieces of land. This property appears on the Lerouge plan of 1767. It occupied quite precisely the location of the current Hôtel Sivard de Beaulieu. Around 1765, Charles-Antoine Sivard, son of Laurent-Antoine Sivard, increased his inheritance by buying a new property, named the manor of Beaulieu, which had depended since 1479 on the convent of the Cordeliers of Valognes. According to Father Jean Canu, he had the current hotel built around 1782.

Charles Antoine Sivard de Beaulieu, from a bourgeois family established in Valognes since the 17th century, was locally one of the major figures of the revolutionary period. Born in 1742, he was a lawyer and assessor in the bailiwick of Valognes, then president of the court. In 1774, he bought the ennobling office of king's secretary and also became lieutenant general of the bailiwick of Cotentin, then mayor of the city in 1790. Suspected of intelligence with the enemies of the Republic, he was part of the batch of 19 people from the district taken to Paris on July 15, 1794 to be judged by the Revolutionary Court. We remember that, having broken a wheel on the way, the convoy did not arrive at its destination until the day after the fall of Robespierre, saving the lives of the representatives of the city considered the most fiercely monarchist in all of Normandy. Not too vindictive, Sivard de Beaulieu later rose to the rank of Baron d'Empire and was elected deputy for La Manche in 1818.

From 1830 to 1871, the hotel housed English Carmelites, who, for the needs of their community, had a chapel built in 1837. On August 5, 1871, the hotel was sold for 80,000 francs to the nuns of the Refuge de Caen, who housed young girls and children. The growing number of "refugees" led them to build dormitories, a linen room and an infirmary, put into service in September 1872. The classrooms, refectories and dormitories, as well as the chapel, were totally ruined during the Allied bombings of June 1944. The hotel itself was burned down, losing a wing. The current chapel, in the Reconstruction style, was rebuilt in 1959 by MM. Isnard and Epaud, architects.

The current facade on the street was initially the facade on the garden, the layout of the road to Bricquebec having been modified since. Its elevation is articulated around a central avant-corps treated in freestone, and delimited by bossed chains. The set is surmounted by a large triangular pediment adorned with an armorial stone left pending. A horseshoe-shaped porch provides access to the front door. The latter is topped with a semi-circular lintel adorned with a projecting key. All the windows are covered with a simple straight lintel. A horizontal strip highlights the first floor. Bull's eye windows illuminate the attic. Several old postcards show the old gate destroyed in 1944, which once opened onto rue Saint-François.

[by] Stephanie Javel/Julien Deshayes

