

Château de Sassetôt-le-Mauconduit

The Oldest record dates back to 1204. In that year prince Philippe Auguste seized the land of Sassetot and presented it to the House of Harcourt, one of the most powerful dynasties in Normandy at that time. Sassetot remained in the hands of Harcourt many years. Afterwards Sassetot became the property of the House of Mauconduit and Estouteville. In 1598 Marie de Bourbon lady of Saint -Pol and Estouteville (the widow of Léonor of Orléans, Duke of Longueville) sold the estate to Louis de Moncel. It was at that time that Henri IV elevated the land of Sassetot to a full fiefdom under the name of "Fief de Moncel- Sassetot".

A short time later, it became the property of the Bigots, a noble family. Jean-Robert Bigot was a highly-placed and powerful lord. He was president of Normandy parliament and councillor to the king. And...he was the man who laid the first stone of what was to become the present castle on April 11, 1772.

The Chateau was then inherited by his daughter who, got married to the Marquis of Martinville, a gentlemen of king's chamber around 1790. In 1858 he in his turn left the Chateau to his nephew, the Marquis of Boishébert. The latter, however, only kept the castle in his possession for 15 years. In 1873 he made a sales agreement with landlord Albert Perquer, father-in- law of the Count of Mun. In 1875 this man, Albert Perquer, hosted the most eventful visit of the history of the castle.

The whole story began on 31 July 1875. That day a royal train stopped in the station of Fécamp. It had brought Sissi, Empress Elisabeth of Austria to the castle of Sassetot, together with the eight-year-old Marie- Valérie. The doctors at the Court of Vienna had prescribed a cure of briney sea breezes on the beaches of Normandy for the young Archduchess. Why did Sissi precisely come to Sassetot? Was there maybe a special bond between Albert Perquer and the Court of Vienna? No. The Head of the Vienna royal Court, the "Grand Chamberlain", had simply selected the castle for its magnificent location. Beforehand he had come to negotiate with the Norman landlord

about the exceptional visit. However the first contact did not go without a hitch. Albert Perquer did not simply want to let his castle and to have the necessary alterations made just like that. But eventually he agreed. It was indeed a great honour to have a royal visitor and.... it was undoubtedly well-remunerated also.

When Sissi arrived in the summer of 1875 accompanied by a retinue of 70 attendants, she made quite a sensation in the otherwise so quiet Sassetot. But Sissi astounded the local population in more ways than one. She used to go swimming every day at the nearby beach in Les Petites Dalles and to shield her from the stares of the curious, she ordered that a veritable corridor of canvas be constructed between her beach cabin and the sea.

Later on the day she went horseback riding across the fields around the castle which the local farmers were not always very pleased with Sissi's horse trampled far too much wheat and sugar beets for their taste. But the Norman peasants received ample compensations. On day- on 11 September to be precise- the royal vacationer had an accident. On the castle grounds a British riding master had erected an obstacle course. Sissi's new mount "Zouave" missed an obstacle and fell, leaving its royal rider unconscious on the ground. The local physician, known to all as "the good doctor Renault" administered treatment until Sissi's personal doctor got to the scene

Towards the end of September 1875 Sissi left Sassetot. She personally took leave of the local mayor and the minister, who thanked her for her many gifts to the village.

Sissi never returned to Sassetot after that but her sojourn in the summer 1875 had been long enough to give the village and the castle a lasting memory. Until today something has lingered from the glamour and romance of the most fairy-tale empress from history.