



Saint-Frères, the number one jute manufacturer in France

Jute, imported from the Indies, was introduced to the Somme by Scotsman James Carmichael, who built the first factory in Ailly-sur-Somme in 1843. This new plant generated such keen interest that it soon replaced the local crops of flax and hemp, and won over the Saint brothers, who already had a textile factory in Beauval.

However, it was in 1857, in Flixecourt, that they would lay the first cornerstone of their jute company. This was to become the largest factory in the Somme department.

The adoption of mechanical looms, then the invention of the circular loom in 1932 and its introduction into industrial production in 1942, were to guarantee the company a dominant position that it held up to the economic crisis of the 1970's.

In 1911, the company had seventeen factories, including thirteen in the Somme, one in the Oise, one in the Manche and one in Belgium. Production was distributed through one hundred and thirty-one sales offices and branches throughout France and abroad (North Africa and Latin America). The company employed 11,000 workers, including 9,000 in the Somme, where 30% of its energy was concentrated on spinning and weaving flax, hemp, and jute. In 1917, Saint-Frères had 30% of jute spindles in France.

The Nievre Valley

Beginning with the first installation in Flixecourt in 1857, Saint Freres multiplied their production sites all over the Nievre Valley, taking advantage of the hydraulic power supplied by the river. The valley was soon to accommodate over 6,000 workers. Entire families and generations have been involved in the production of jute. However, other traces left by Saint Freres are more important still. The chateaus at Flixecourt or Ville-le-Marcllet illustrate the success of this industrial era, proof of a social paternalism affirmed by the string of workers' housing estates erected from 1871, the «Prévoyances» (cooperative houses), daycare centers, schools, and nurse schools in Flixecourt, built in 1940.



Photos: couverture, 1, 2, 3 et 5 : B. Fournier - 4 : J. Barbecor / Région Picardie - Inventaire général, 2008.



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Saint Frères The jute industry in the Nievre Valley



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The Nievre Valley < Grand-Amiénois < Somme < Picardie



Harondel ①



In 1861, the former wool factory Moinet, in Berteauco-les-Dames, was acquired by Jean-Baptiste Saint. There he set up a jute spinning factory, which marked the first step of Saint-Frères' industrial expansion into the Nièvre Valley. The Harondel factory saw rapid development with the addition of a mechanical loom, which called for the construction of new workshops in 1870 and 1891.

Most of the buildings can still be seen. The industrial complex, which accommodated over 1500 people at the beginning of World War II, extend out into the Saint-Léger-les-Domart area in the form of an imposing workers' housing estate, the Cité Saint-Charles, built between 1871 and 1890.

The largest of the Saint chateaus is that built on the outskirts of the town, by Jean-Baptiste Saint's widow, after his death in 1880. The «La Navette» castle, as it is known, is a magnificent neo-Louis XIII castle, built between 1882 and 1886, according to plans by the architect Paul-Louis Delefortrie.

Naturally, the site was directly served by the railroad, which ran right up to the workshops. After the sale of the company to the Willot group, the Moulins-Bleus factory was the first close in 1978.

L' Etoile ④



Where the Somme and the Nièvre rivers come together, the Moulins-Bleus have been dedicated to industry since the middle ages. In 1883, Saint Frères invested in this complex that included even more mills and around forty houses previously built by Octave Blanchet. The site has been entirely renovated to accommodate new activities.

Pont Rémy ⑤



Purchased in 1885 and 1887, the Pont-Rémy weaving factory was one of the last acquisitions carried out by the Saint-Frères company. In addition to the workers' housing estates at the beginning of the 20th century, a «Prévoyance» (cooperative house) was built in 1910 by the architect Anatole Bienaimé. This is one of the most well-preserved out of the seven that were constructed from a single model during the same period.

Saint-Ouen ②



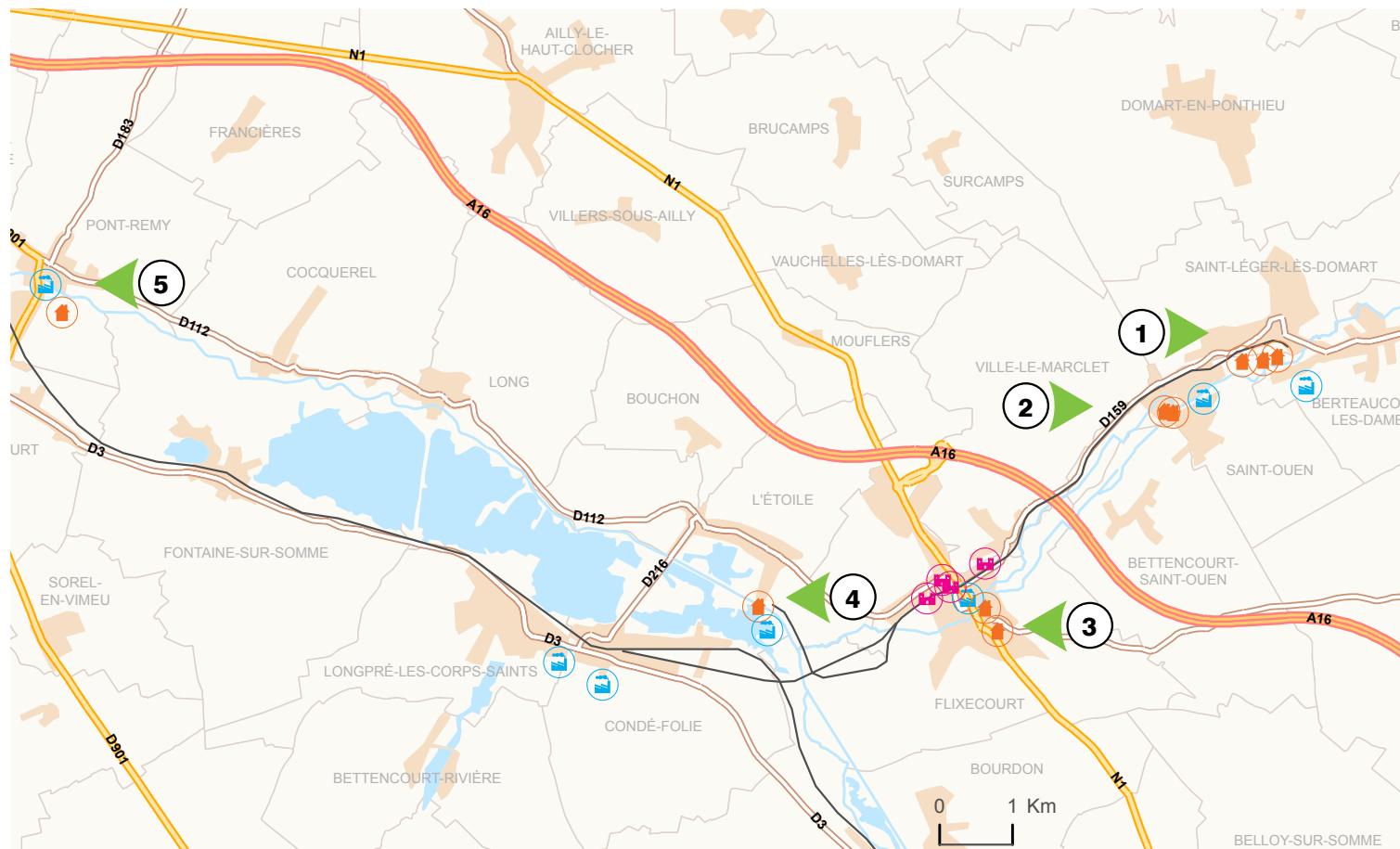
In 1864, Saint-Frères invested in another, existing industrial complex on the Nièvre, where hemp and jute spinning were installed in the former Crignon hydraulic spinner. 236 workers were there in 1870. It was here that the primary activity was enriched by other branches that contributed to making the company one of the most powerful in the department: a rope factory was created there in 1877, with braid and sole workshops added in 1892. Over three-quarters of factory personnel are accommodated in the housing estates that stretch out in long rows nearby, and are named after members of the Saint family.

Flixecourt ③



The cradle of the Saint-Frères jute manufacture, Flixecourt welcomed the first mechanical jute loom in 1857. Starting there, industrial plants continue all along the national route, with the most notably being the canvas factory, built in 1894-1895 and imposing with its long facade punctuated by eighteen spans. In 1901, other workshops were erected, marked by this curvilinear facade carrying the Saint logos.

Several chateaus were built between 1870 and 1912, as other symbols of the company's success. The Red chateau, built between 1870 and 1892, became an executive residence, then a training center opened in 1929, and, from 1935, a school of the domestic sciences. Not far from there, the White chateau was built for Alice Saint, in 1912.



Saint Frères factory



Saint Frères castle



Workers' housing

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