

# A fanfare of orphans - the brass band of the St-Georges-de-l'Isle orphanage in Saint-Fraimbault-de-Prières

Gavin Holman, 6 September 2022



The Château de l'Isle, in Saint-Fraimbault-de-Prières (Mayenne, Pays de la Loire), was the property of the Count and Countess of Héliand, who in 1867 donated their land to the poor, the elderly and the orphans of the region. In October 1875, the first Daughters of Charity (a company founded by Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac in 1633) officially took possession of the Isle estate, which took the name of Saint-Georges-de-l'Isle, in reference to the son of the Countess, Georges Héliand, who had been killed at the Battle of Castelfidardo in 1860.

Over the years and faced with the growing number of orphans, the castle grew with new buildings, under the leadership of Sister Catherine. During the First World War, the castle became an annex of the Mayenne hospital and housed wounded soldiers in convalescence.



Pierre Jouanne (1893-1957), a former orphan from the home, established the Saint-Georges-de-l'Isle brass band for orphans, which operated from 1924 to 1957. He founded the band on 1 March 1924, in recognition of the Sisters of St Vincent, who had raised him, and to help the hospice with its financial difficulties. The band was known as *Fanfare des Orphelins de St-Georges-de-l'Isle*.



*Pierre Jouanne*

Originally it was not intended for the little musicians to perform outdoors, but once they had been heard at the Mayenne gymnastic concourse, in July 1926, they became a popular addition to many events in the region and further afield – helping to raise funds for the home with their engagements.



Their instruments were the same as those used by adult musicians in bands, and some of the children barely reached the height of their instrument. The small bass drum player was 5½ years old (in 1932), and the two deputy leaders were 10 and 11 years old at that time.

Some of the events at which the band played were: in Paris, in 1927, in front of the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, where General Mariaux kissed the small bass drum player after their performance of the national anthem; at the Caen Nautical Festival; in Alençon; at the flower festival in Rennes; and at the Maus (Leon Bollée Stadium). In 1928 they played at Fougerolles-du-Plessis (Mayenne); at Angers (the Cirque-Theatre). In 1929, at Morlaix. In 1930, at the Lyon Theatre Grande; and at the annual Flag Part at Fougères, in June. In June 1932 in the Parc Becquart, in Saumur, and at the St Charles fete at Thouars. It played at the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the

Honfleur Amicable Society for the Wounded and Reformed, in July 1937. Later, in September 1937 the band performed at the celebrations at Troarn for their agricultural competition and the inauguration of the drinking water supply in Troarn and Saint-Pair, together with the the “Children of Troarn” band, and bands of the sappers-firefighters of St-Pierre-sur-Dives and Troarn.



*The band at Saumur, June 1932*

The band played a wide range of music including the finale of Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony; the March, Prayer and Chorus from Mozart's Magic Flute; Gluck's March of Alceste; etc.

In a similar fashion to other children's homes bands, of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Fanfare des Orphelins de St-Georges-de-l'Isle were depicted on a wide range of picture postcards which were sold to raise funds and promote the band and its activities. A selection of these various images are given at the end of this paper.

The band disbanded following the death of Pierre Jouanne in 1957, but over a thousand boys had been trained by him over the previous 32 years.



*Château de l'Isle*

In June 1964, a fire destroyed part of the annex buildings, which were then enlarged and modernized, and the orphanage was finally closed in 1972, with the buildings becoming a retirement home which included a centre for disabled adults.

One former orphan from the home, Guy Helbert, provided some memories of his time at the orphanage and in the band, during its final years. He was six months old when his mother died, and he was entrusted to the Saint-Georges de l'Isle orphanage.

“Life in the home was not comfortable. The rooms were large, the beds made of mattresses and there was no heating. In winter, frost clinged to the tiles. Fifty boys lived in one building, fifty girls in another, only seeing each other at mass. The children in the band often spent their Sundays in a rickety bus, travelling to play at the other end of France. They were welcomed like “little angels” by families who hosted them overnight. The children, who were “thin as nails” looked wide-eyed at their hosts’ Sunday tables. There was meat and fruit that they had never seen. The hosts, and others, would give them toys and money. Sadly, before leaving, the sisters took care to pick their pockets. The children saw nothing of their gifts.”

In October 1957, when Guy was eleven years old, he was told that he had to go to another institution, without nuns, without music, without his baritone horn. Before he left, the mother superior hugged him tenderly - the only moment of love he can remember from his time at the orphanage.

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Here are some 30 of the many different views of the *Fanfare des Orphelins de St-Georges-de-l'Isle*, produced as promotional postcards.





A+D 3. Les Contrebasses de la Fanfare des Orphelins de St-Georges-de-l'Isle - St-FRAIMBAULT-de-PRIÈRES (Mayenne)



A+D 2. Les Tambours de la Fanfare des Orphelins de St-Georges-de-l'Isle - St-JAMES-BOLT-de-PRIÈRES (Mayer.ne)





A†D B. Basses, Barytons et Altos de la Fantare des Orpheins de St-Georges-de-l'Isle  
St-FRAIMBAULT-de-PRIÈRES (Mayenne)



A+D -4. Les Bugles et Pistons de la Fanfare des Orphelins de St-Georges-de-l'Isle  
St-FRAIMBAULT-de-PRIÈRES (Mayenne)

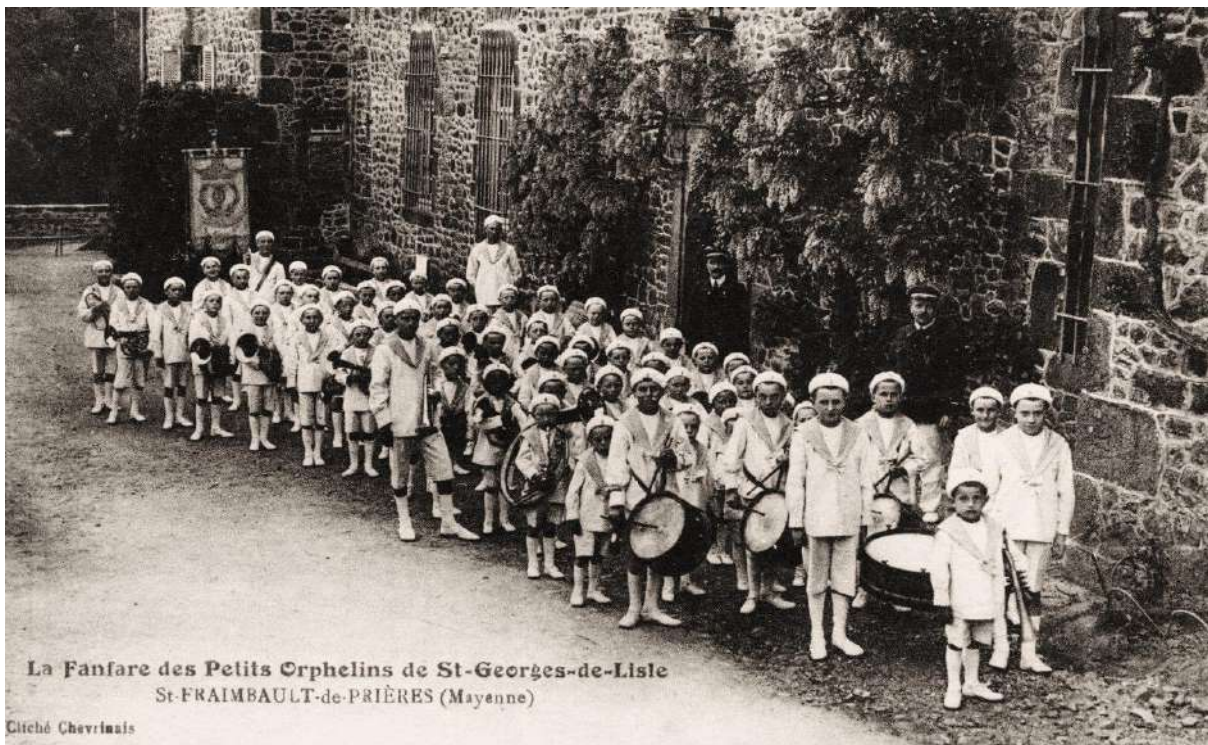








*A. Chevrinols, 1911*  
**La Fanfare des Orphelins de St-Georges de Lisle**  
St-FRAIMBAULT-de-PRIÈRES (Mayenne)



**La Fanfare des Petits Orphelins de St-Georges-de-Lisle**  
St-FRAIMBAULT-de-PRIÈRES (Mayenne)

*Cliché Chevrinols*



Photo. Chevrinais

Fanfare des Orphelins de St-Georges de Liolè — St-FRAMBAULT-de-PRIÈRES (May.)  
60 exécutants de 5 à 12 ans 183 96



Photo Chevrinais

La Fanfare des Petits Orphelins de ST-GEORGES-de-l'ISLE (Mayenne)



Fanfare des Petits Orphelins de SAINT-GEORGES-de-LISLE  
SAINT-FRAIMBAULT-de-PRIÈRES (Mayenne) - 70 exécutants de 5 à 12 ans



Fanfare des « Petits Orphelins de Saint-Georges-de-Lisle »  
(55 Enfants de 4 a 13 ans) à SAINT-FRAIMBAULT-de-PRIÈRES (La Mayenne)



*Note – these two photographs are slightly different from each other*





La Fanfare des Petits Orphelins de St-Georges-de-Lisle - St-FRAIMBAULT-de-PRIÈRES (Mayenne)



Fanfare des Petits Orphelins de St-Georges-de-Lisle — Enfants de 4 à 13 ans  
à ST-FRAIMBAULT-de-PRIÈRES



Fanfare des Petits Orphelins de St-Georges-de-Lisle à ST-FRAIMBAULT-de-PRIÈRES (Mayenne)

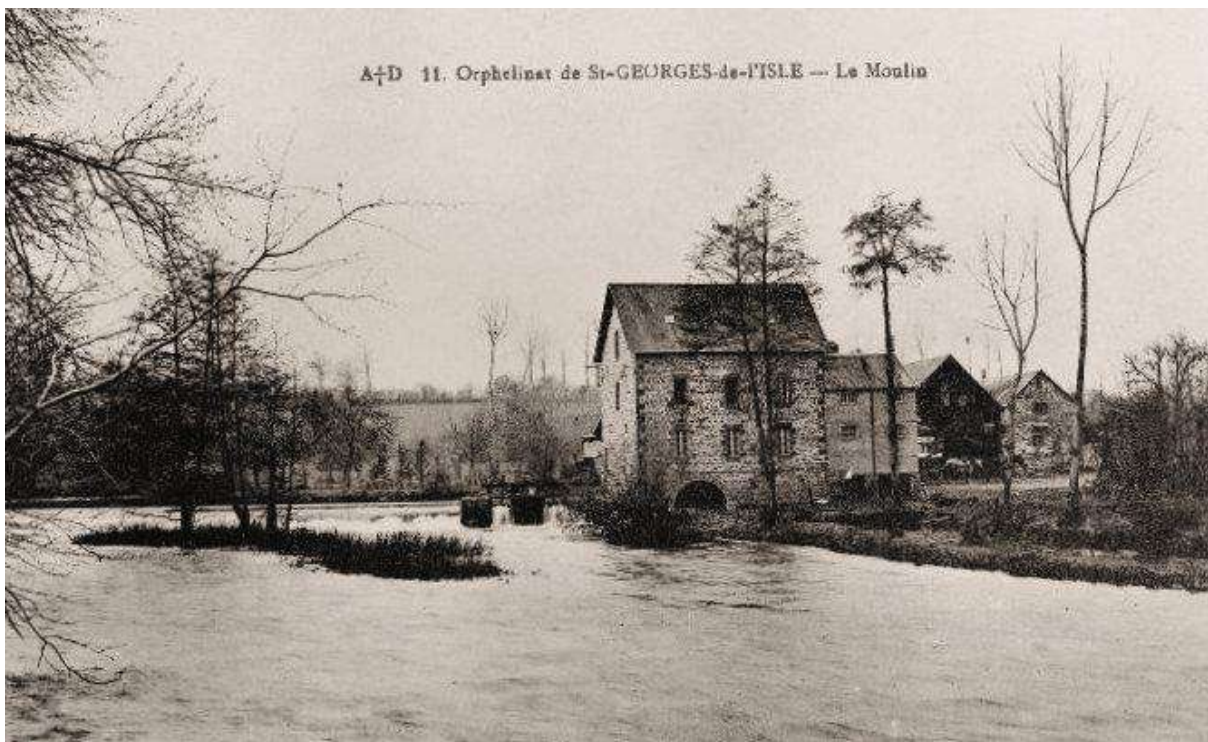


« Fanfare des Orphelins de St-Georges de Lisle » — SAINT-FRAIMBAULT DE PRIÈRES (Mayenne)  
55 exécutants de 4 à 14 ans









*The mill at the orphanage*