

A-Z of the Communes of the Deux-Sèvres.

by Sue Burgess

Bressuire

Bressuire is the capital of the Pays du bocage Bressuirais which includes Bressuire, Cerizay and Mauléon. It is the headquarters of the Communauté de Communes cœur du Bocage which regroups the communes of Chiché, Faye l'Abbesse, Courlay and Boismé. The inhabitants of Bressuire are called the Bressuirais.

The names Berzoriacum can be found around 1030 and Berzorium in 1073 and 1100.

Bressuire was perhaps a crossroads in Celtic and Gallic Roman times. However, the town is mentioned for the first time in the 11th century where we can find mention of Saint-Cyprien Chapel.

The medieval city ('Castrum Berzoriacum') depended on the Viscount of Thouars and there were three parishes : Notre-Dame, Saint-Jean and Saint-Nicolas. The latter, situated within the castle walls, has disappeared today. The foundations of the crypt are supposed to be buried underground.

The medieval castle (ruins) is on a hill overlooking the old town and the Priory that the Viscount of Thouars abandoned about 1030 to the monks of the Abbey of Saint-Cyprien of Poitiers. The outer walls of the castle were built in the 13th century as well as a fortified wall with several towers and 5 doors.

From the Middle Ages to the 15th century, Bressuire prospered and the town had 10 000 inhabitants. The city was known for its cloth manufacturing. The town and the castle suffered during The Hundred Years' War. At the end Du Guesclin took the town which was in the hands of the English.

The wars of religion in the 16th century marked the decline of Bressuire. This was the beginning of the «Black years» and the number of inhabitants fell to 2 000.

The Golden Age of cloth making can be said to be in the 17th and beginning of the 18th century. The speciality of Bressuire was «tiretaine» which was sold throughout the west of France, in Normandy and in Paris. There were specific rules about how the fabric was to be woven.

During the Vendée Wars the town was a republican town in the heart of the royalist bocage. The town was taken in 1793 by the Royal Catholic army. However, Grignon's republican column set fire to the town and raided it leaving few houses standing. The population was forced to take refuge in the surrounding area, Airvault to the east, Saumur to the north and Niort to the south.

It was with the arrival of the railway in 1866 that the urban landscape changed. The town became a railway hub joined

to La Roche-sur-Yon, Niort, Poitiers via Parthenay, Thouars, Cholet and La Rochelle via Fontenay-le-Comte. Until 1971, Bressuire Station was the crossing point for two passenger lines, Nantes-Limoges and Paris-Les Sables d'Olonne.

The town suffered during the two World Wars. But after 1950 the town revived with the arrival of several small industries which are still active today – dressmaking, wood, meat processing, metal work, mechanics, soldering, metallurgy. The 20th century marked the decline of railway activity, firstly for passenger trains and then for freight. Service industries mean that Bressuire, with just under 20 000 inhabitants is today a major town of North Deux-Sèvres.



À VOIR / MUST SEE:

The commune boasts 8 historical monuments:

- Saint Cyprien Church and its crypt
- Bressuire Castle
- Notre Dame Church
- Saint Sauveur de Givre en Mai Church.
- Puy-Blain at Terves, built in the 15th century.
- The old castle at Noirlieu, which has been partly demolished and which was originally built between 1565-1575 and 1604.
- The domain of Dubrie, a manor house dating from the 16th and 17th century.
- The disused Petit-Puy Chapel at Terves.

There are also other interesting monuments, sites and festivals:

- Saint Porchaire Church
- Notre Dame Cloister (former convent) with its animated Christmas nativity scene.
- Saint Nicolas manor
- Cornet Mill (17th century) at Terves, at Puy-Fort. An important place during the Vendée Wars.
- The town museum
- La coulée verte, the green corridor, the banks of the river Dolo with their walkways and bicycle tracks.
- The Highland Games – 9th and 10th June 2012
- 7th Grand Prix Automobile Historique de Bressuire, 30th June and 1st July 2012.

Please return to this section next month to see the continuation of 'A-Z of the Communes of the Deux-Sèvres.'



POITIERS / LONDON-STANSTED

- Until June 30th and from September 1st to October 26th
Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Sunday
- From July 1st to August 31st
Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Sunday

POITIERS / EDINBURGH

- From July 1st to August 28th
Tuesday, Sunday

Also available :
POITIERS
BARCELONA-GIRONA
2 flights per week
Friday and Monday
Until 26th October

Booking on www.ryanair.com – Information on www.poitiers.aeroport.fr