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A-Z of the Communes in the Deux-Sèvres

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

by Sue Burgess

ECHIRÉ

Between the hedgerows of the Gâtine and the Niort plain, the town of Echiré has been sculpted by the valley and the 18km of meanders of the Sèvre Niortaise river. Mills and wash-houses are still a witness to the commune's rich past.

The reputation of Echiré today comes both from its medieval fortress, Coudray-Salbart, and its co-operative dairy with its Poitou-Charentes butter. The AOC labelled butter, with its nutty flavour, has been served at the Elysée since the time of René Coty (1956), in the Principality of Monaco and at Buckingham Palace. In 2003 the dairy won the London Chamber of Commerce prize for the best French exporter.

At the gateway to the Marais Poitevin and on the northern side of the greater Niort urban area, Echiré has a rich, natural architecture. The 3,265 inhabitants, the Échiréens and the Échiréennes, are well served by local commerces. There are small local shops and a supermarket.

Farming and animal breeding remain popular in the area but the entreprise zone, ZAE le Luc-les Carreaux, which stretches between Niort, Echiré and St Gelais, allows for the development of local businesses and jobs.

A VOIR / MUST SEE

There are three listed châteaux on the commune:

Coudray Salbart castle (photo right) is a 12th and 13th century fortress which is owned by the Greater Niort Council. It is open for visits all year round and is often the scene of festivals and medieval shows.



Built on the banks of the river Sèvre Niortaise, Coudray Salbart is probably the best kept example of a military fortress in France or perhaps even in Europe. It differs because of its Plantagenet architecture. There is a circular walk-way inside the walls which is unique in France. The holes through which the arrows were shot are in the form of a cross. The restoration work which has been undertaken since 2005 has been accompanied by archaeological digs.



Above: Château de la Taillée. Photo: wikipediacommons.org

The **château de la Taillée** was built in the 17th century and is still owned by the descendants of the first owners. There are two pigeon lofts which have been restored. The château is available for seminaries, weddings and other functions.

Le château de Mursay was the home of Madame de Maintenon, the morganatic wife of Louis XIV. The church which is situated in the centre of the market town has some architectural elements dating from the 13th century.

The Mélusine au Bord de la Sèvre walking circuit passes near to the château along the calm banks of the river Sèvre towards the hamlets and old houses with impressive pigeon lofts. The 12km walk starts from the Marais parking area and is marked out by yellow arrows. The brochure and map are available from the Town Hall.

More 'A-Z of the Communes of the Deux-Sèvres.'
next month...