



LA FOYE-MONJAULT

A small village in the Deux-Sèvres, La Foye-Monjault is a part of the canton of Beauvoir-sur-Niort. At a height of 55 metres above sea-level and with the neighbouring communes of Vallans and Usseau, the 756 inhabitants (les Fayais, Fayaises) live on a commune which stretches over 19,1 km².

The name of the village comes from «frêne» (faya) which confirms that at the end of the 11th century La Foye was covered with woods, and in particular, beech trees. The word then became Faya Moncolis - the Monks' beechwood and then La Foye-Monjault. The monks cleared the trees as early as 1080 in order to grow cereal crops and grapes.

The commune is characterised by a large number of hamlets, three of which (Treillebois, Limoullais and le Puyroux) are quite large. The history of the commune has been built around the monks of the middle ages, water, farming and wine.

Close to the old village square and the pond are traces of the former small monastery. The commune has a number of wells which means that it has always had water of a high quality. Wine and farming have been the basis of the activity of the commune over the years.

Foye Monjault wines were famous very early on and remained so for a long time. Rabelais wrote about them and they were drunk at the courts of Henri IV and François I.

A VOIR / MUST SEE

- The ancient priory church of St Simon and St Jude.
- The Benedictine monastery was given to the Abbey Saint-Jean-de-Montierneuf of Poitiers by the count of Poitou in 1077. The chapel is now the parish church. Partly destroyed during the revolution, it was bought by a private individual. The existing bell wall and the sanctuary were built on the same spot in the 19th century.
- The water tower has been painted green. There is a 350 metre deep well near the water tower which was in fact never used as the water contained iron. The water clock (l'horloge à eau) of André Maret is 1.3m long and 1.6m high.
- La Foye-Monjault holds a wine and regional produce fair on the second weekend in October.

FRANÇOIS

According to Mr François Villaneau, a former teacher, today deceased, the name of François might come from an ancient colony of Franks established on the banks of the Sèvre river during the reign of Charlemagne. Other theories say that the name may come from the word «franchise» the liberty granted to the parish.

The name and spelling of François has evolved as follows:

- 1244 - Françoy
- 1300 - Frances
- 1390 - François
- 1585, 1619, 1650 - François (maps of Poitou)
- 1690 - Le François (map of the Bishopric of Poitiers)
- 1657 to 1788 - Notre Dame de François. This name is found from 1657 in the Parish registers but mainly refers to the church. The inhabitants of François are known as the Françiens and the Françiennes.

The commune of François is crossed by several Roman or Gallic roads.

Le chemin Chevalleret (at Bonneuil) is an ancient Roman road which went from Poitiers to Jard-sur-Mer crossing the old bridge at Azay le Brûlé. It crossed Bonneuil along the line of the D7 from La Crèche to Cherveux. The road crossed two rivers: the Chambon at the ford of Guerreau near the bridge that is used today and the Musson by the bridge "Pont de l'Huillerie" shown on the 1830 map. (There may have been a ford there before the bridge). Le chemin Chevalleret is still partially visible as you come out of the village of Bonneuil towards Cherveux. Le chemin de la Brissaise (at François) is an old Roman road which went from Rom to Jard-sur-Mer.

There were three water mills on the commune. The moulin de l'Îlot and the moulin de François were on the river Sèvre. The mills still exist today but are now no longer used.

The moulin de l'Etang was on the Musson river and worked with a series of locks. Only the mill race and a pile of stones remain today. The mill has disappeared.

Three of the four wash-houses can still be seen on the commune. During the second world war the commune was the home to several families of refugees from the Ardennes.

FRESSINES

The name Fressines is certainly related to the presence of numerous «frênes» (ash trees). The name "FRAZINA" appeared for the first time in 1259, the commune became Saint-Martin de Fressines, and then Fressines after the Revolution.

Around 1530 there were numerous mills all over Poitou. Flour from Bagnault, which was very famous, was transported on the backs of mules to Niort and then along the waterways to Marans, La Rochelle and Rochefort. To get from Bagnault to Niort, the mule-drivers went along the Roman road which followed the main road through the village, crossed the river at Pontreau or Pont Charrault, and then turned towards Papeau and on to Niort. This is the old route to the sea or the «chemin des saulniers» (salt-workers' road) which passed through Fressines. Several mills which have since disappeared were spread over the valley. The surrounding fields were worked by labourers who worked the wheat fields.

The 16th century was a period of religious conflict. Calvin's protestantism anchored itself in the area. The edict of Nantes put an end to the conflicts which opposed the catholics and the protestants. The protestants set up strongholds in Thouars, St Maixent and Niort. Louis XIV decided to unify the country to fight off invaders and obliged the protestants to turn back to «the true religion». A new method of oppression «the dragonnades», was invented. The king's soldiers, the dragons, lived with protestant families and persuaded them to renounce protestantism and sign the «rôle» of new converts. Fressines was in the majority protestant and therefore the seat of some of the famous «dragonnades». In 1681, under the persecution of the king's dragons, 328 inhabitants of FRESSINES denied their religion. In 1685, Louis XIV revoked the edict of Nantes. The pastors had to flee France. The protestants who wished to practice their religion met at night in the woods, the forests and the fields. In Fressines meetings were held at Bois-Martin and la Chesnaye. The dead were buried at night in small plots of land belonging to private individuals. Here we can find the origin of the small cemeteries which can be found on the commune of Fressines and all over the area. Another sign of the presence of the protestants is the number of temples. In the protestant villages, no statues of Christ or Mary can be found and there are no stone crosses at the angles between the fields.

However, the landscapes are often punctuated by stone pines. This tree which originated in the south of France, owes its presence here to hawkers and traders who sold bibles and other protestant works which were forbidden. They gave seeds and asked people to sow them to show their friendship with the protestants. Houses with this tree were a safe refuge for protestants.

A VOIR / MUST SEE

- St Martin's church: A romanesque style building begun in 1260. The church is dedicated to St Martin (the bishop of Tours). It was a priory which depended on the Abbey of Lesterps (16). The old bell tower was destroyed by a sonic boom in 1967. The present bell tower holds a bell dating from 1878. The protestant temple was destroyed in 1970. It stood where the hairdresser's is today.
- The Pigeon Loft (remains): The 17th century pigeon loft belongs to the château of Bougouin which is in fact on the commune of la Crèche. It is a private property.

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