

LOUIN

by Sue Burgess

The bourg of Louin is situated on the left bank of the Thouet, three kilometres South West of Airvault. To the South West, there is also the Cébron river which, along with its two tributaries the Raconnière and the Tacconière, make up the Cebron lake.

Latest statistics show that there are 766 inhabitants of Louin of whom 752 are permanent residents. 14 people have holiday homes here.



The origin of the name Louin was explained by the priest, father Chauvin in 1969. *"The Thouet river valley has been inhabited for thousands of years. The little town of Louin has been the site of different habitations for many years since carved stones and even the remains of a dolmen can be found here."*

It is quite likely that 4000 years before Christ, there were scattered tribes living around the area, wearing wolf-skins and living from hunting and fishing. The monuments that they left behind were used for worship. They also had workshops for working copper.

The Celts arrived about 500 years BC, from the centre of Europe. They brought new techniques and inspired the religion of the druids.

The word Louin has Celtic origins. According to Henri-Paul Eydoux it is a deformation of LUCO-dunos, which meant hill with a lot of natural light. Lougdounos was Lugdunum. Near Bresse and in the Dauphine, Lugdunum became Lyon; in Poitou it became Louin.

How?

In a first document dating from 1095 we can find Loung.
In the 12th century Loooin and Loong can be found.
In 1263: Loyng.
In 1300: Loing.
In 1366: Louhin. The G has disappeared. The H fell out of use in the following centuries and today we are left with Louin.

A VOIR / MUST SEE

- **The Croix Hosannière.** These are funeral monuments which have been used for about a thousand years. The Croix Hosannière of Louin dates from the 12th century. There are no inscriptions. The cross in limestone has a circular base. It is registered as a historical monument.
- **L'Hypogée Gallo Romaine/The mausoleum.** The most remarkable monument is the mausoleum. It was discovered in May 1898 probably by a labourer working on the parcel of land at the Champ des Chênes. When he dug more deeply, he discovered an entrance door which had been walled up and found himself standing at the entrance to an ancient burial chamber which contained two stone sarcophagus.



The largest was 2m 30 long and 76cm wide; It was lined with a lead coffin which still contained the skeleton of a 30 year old man. This sarcophagus was made of marble from the Garonne area. The other which was made in granite from the Airvault area, contained the remains of a child of about 5 or 6 years old.

In the largest there was a glass vase of a milky white colour. It would appear that some jewellery was also found. The vase was sold to a Parisian in 1915 but no-one seems to know what has happened to either the vase or the jewellery since.

Some digs were authorised above the burial chamber and some remains of a temple were found. It has been established by comparing what has been found here with the hypogee of Poitiers (which can be dated with certainty because of coins that were found there), that the mausoleum of Louin is a pagan hypogee from the end of the 4th century.

- The 12th century bridge that crosses the Thouret in the centre of the village. The architecture of the bridge is typical of that of the medieval villages of the Thouars area.
- **La Maduère** – The privately owned farm was once the home of the family of La Fontaine on his mother's side.
- **Saint Martin's Church.** The church dates from the last part of the 19th century.

It replaced a Gothic building which was destroyed in 1875 during a fire in an oil making factory that was adjoining to it. This church was made of a narthex (entrance) surmounted by a bell tower, a baptistery on the right and a stairway leading to the belfry on the left. The nave must have been 7m 30 long by 11m 70 wide.

It is possible that this church was at one time a priory.

The original church which dated from 1095 depended on Airvault Abbey.

The current building is in a cross form with a nave, a transept and a choir. Part of the chevet of the original Gothic building still exists as well as the bell tower.

- **The Bells.** The bell tower was built at the end of the 12th or beginning of the 13th century. There are 5 bells. The oldest Martine was installed in the 17th century and has been listed since 1912. The other 4 were baptised in 1874.
- **Les Croix des Chemins/The crosses on the roadways.** 21 crosses can be found on the commune. Many of them are at crossroads. They are a witness to how religious our ancestors were.
- **Les Lavoirs de Louin et de Champeau/Louin and Champeau wash-houses.**
- **Four Banal village oven.** At 7 place Saint Martin, the door gave access to the four banal village oven which was the oven of the priory of Louin.

Over the door we can read "FOVR BANAL DV PE" (FOUR Banal du Prieur) and the date of 1711.

Dating back to Feudal times 'Banalités' were technical installations that the lord of the manor had to keep in good condition and make available for anyone living on his lands. The peasants paid a due to use them. At the time of the Revolution these installations (ovens, mills, wine presses) became the property of the commune.

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