



A-Z of the Communes in the Deux-Sèvres

MELLERAN

by Sue Burgess

Melleran is a rural commune situated between Chef-Boutonne and Sauzé-Vaussais. There are 528 inhabitants in the commune which is crossed by the Greenwich meridian.

The name of Melleran comes from 'miel' (honey) - 'mel' in Latin. Honey was collected in the large chestnut trees which used to grow on the commune in Gallic-Roman times. Notre Dame de Melleran church was built during the 12th century and became a listed historical monument in 1913.

The church overlooks a huge square, sheltered by lime trees and horse chestnut trees, which was the place where mule and donkey fairs were held. Melleran mule and donkey fairs were well known. The château was built in the 16th century – it was later destroyed and the stones were used to pave the pathways. The only part of the château that remains today is a vaulted cellar.

There was also a pond which was used as drinking water for the animals. It was filled in during the 1970s and turned into an open area with lots of trees.

A VOIR / MUST SEE

- **Notre Dame of Melleran church.** The 12th century church underwent numerous alterations during the Gothic period. Today three ribbed vaults cover the unique nave. The crests of families who probably paid for the different restorations decorate the keystones of the vaults. In the choir, there is an impressive altarpiece. The main entrance is situated in the South side. It is a Romanesque side door. The western facade which usually houses the main entrance to a church, has no opening. The central span under the bell tower is another Romanesque part of the church. This bell tower of the church of Melleran is one of the most unusual bell towers of the area. There are about 1 000 species of trees and shrubs and botanical roses.

MÉNIGOUTE

Ménigoute is a rural commune with about 900 inhabitants. The closeness of the Atlantic, just 80km away, gives a temperate climate which favours biodiversity and a rich flora and fauna. The local landscapes are shaped by valleys and small rivers which have their sources on the heights of the Poitevine Gatine.

It is thought that the name of Ménigoute is formed from two words. 'Mensil' which means 'villa' and 'Gothorum' which means 'The Goths'. In 1300 Ménigoute was called Manygouste, then Manigouste in 1324. The name developed and became Manigoute or Manigouste in 1328. By 1474 the spelling had changed to Magnigouste and to Magnigoste in 1492. Today's spelling dates from the end of the 18th century.

Ménigoute is well-known for the Festival International du Film Ornithologique (International Ornithological Film Festival). It is the biggest ornithological film festival in France and is held every year during All Saint's week. The first festival was held in 1985 and the 2016 edition will be held from 27th October to 1st November.

A VOIR / MUST SEE

- **La Chapelle Boucard and the chateau.** La Chapelle Jean Boucard is one of the last remaining jewels of the Gothic period in this area! It's construction probably dates from before 1525. Until 1854 it was used as a courtroom.
- **La Croix Hosannière.** It was erected in the 14th century in the middle of the old cemetery behind the church. It was the meeting place for the Palm Sunday Procession and was listed as a historical monument in 1883.
- **Bois Pouvreau.** Bois Pouvreau is a natural site. It extends over 25 hectares of which 11 hectares of water are for fishing. This magnificent site offers a playground, a boules pitch, mini-golf, a bar and restaurant and a natural camp site. There are jetties for fishermen and picnic areas are available for walkers.



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

Melleran Church © WikiCommons/Peitavin