



A-Z of the Communes in the Deux-Sèvres

OROUX

by Sue Burgess

Oroux is a small village with just over 100 inhabitants who are known as the Oroussiens, and the Oroussiennes or the Oréliens and the Oréliennes.

The village is surrounded by the communes of la Ferrière-en-Parthenay, Lhoumois and la Peyratte and is situated 3 km South West of Lhoumois. The commune is part of the 'Pays Thénézéen'.

The name Oroux comes from the Latin *oratorium* (oratorio) and the village has previously been known as Ororio (1090) and Houroux (1400).

A VOIR / MUST SEE

• THE CHÂTEAU

Oroux castle is privately owned and is open to the public on heritage weekend, the third weekend of September.

It was built close to a Roman road and the path to Compostella on the site of a Gallic-Roman villa. The castle of Oroux was dependant on the castellany of la Ferrière-en-Parthenay, on the Senechal of Poitiers and the Archpriest of Parthenay. Built in a U shape, today's buildings date from the 13th century and are flanked by a square tower with three arrowslits on the ground floor. There is a small room on the first floor of the tower with a built-in window seat and a pigeon loft on the top floor.

The two storey wing has three 14th century granite chimneys, 13th century cigar-shaped granite doors and mullion windows. Several of the windows are decorated with stone window seats and wrought iron grills. The third side of the U was fixed on a round tower which has today been levelled off. (Today this side forms the Chapel of the château – Saint Neomaye Chapel.). A second square tower with large arrowslits and a door overlooking the ancient ramparts, is today a bell tower. A door opens onto what was a high defensive wall closes the U shape and joins the tower to the rest of the building. Only the foundations of the defensive wall remain today. They support the patio which is in the inside courtyard.

The second tower of the main building houses a large winding staircase in granite dating from the 14th century. This leads to a second body of buildings with four levels including one which is a double-vaulted cellar from Roman times.

The whole building was badly damaged at the end of the 16th

century during the Wars of Religion, and then again at the end of the 18th century during the Vendee wars in 1793.

A chapel, dedicated to Saint Marie of Oroux, situated in the grounds of the château, was built in 2014 bringing together elements from the 15th and 17th centuries. The chapel was consecrated in August 2015 by the Archbishop of Poitiers. There is a bronze monument dedicated to Joan of Arc, dating from 1861, that was blessed in 2016.

The château is privately owned by the Ambrogi family who live there. They have carried out a lot of restauration work..

• THE CHURCH OF SAINT MARTIN

The 11th century church is closely linked to the Lords of Maurivet and Oroux. It is dedicated to St Martin who came from Hungary in the 4th century. He met Hilaire the bishop of Poitiers and founded the abbey at Ligugé.

The church with its Romanesque door appears quite modest next to the chateau. It is set back from the road and it is easy to drive past it without seeing it. The inside is surprising because of the low ceiling and the lack of windows.

The nave is surmounted by a false vaulted ceiling and there is a small side chapel with a window. This side chapel is in fact the access point to the bell tower.

The paving of the floor includes several funeral stones. As there are no stained glass windows, there are pictures and paintings to illustrate the life if St Martin. There are also several statues and traces of very old wall paintings at the North end of the nave.

The particularity of the church is an imposing square construction at the north end of the sanctuary. The walls are thick and there is little natural light which enters through the arrowslits in the upper part of the walls. Before becoming a bell tower, this building was obviously a prison and or safe refuge or hiding place.

Photo below: Château d'Oroux. Courtesy www.lescommunes.com



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