

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

by Sue Burgess

### **Béceleuf**

Béceleuf boasts a population of 675 inhabitants. Here the ruins of an old castle built by the Lords of Parthenay can be found. According to the legend the castle was one of the homes of Mélusine a fairy of medieval legends who is supposed to have founded the town of Lusignan. Strange noises heard during the night are attributed to her. After the destruction of the castle, the fairy is supposed to have taken refuge under an enormous rock, the «roc Cervelle» which can be seen a few kilometres from Béceleuf. When travellers come too close, the fairy cries out as if protecting her territory. The «roc Cervelle» in the Autize valley is dominated by a grotto where a spring flows in the winter. Legend says that the spring exists because Mélusine spent a penny here.

#### **À VOIR / MUST SEE:**

- The Pousay oak tree can be found on the commune of Béceleuf. The main characteristic of the Pousay oak tree is that it has grown in the middle of a pigeon loft. The tree is classified as one of the 250 remarkable trees of France. The footpaths around it allow walkers to discover the lovely countryside.



### **Belleville**

Belleville is situated in the canton of Beauvoir sur Niort. In the 2009 census the inhabitants of Belleville, the Bellevillois and the Bellevilloises, numbered 118, which represents an increase since 1999. The village is surrounded by the communes of Juillé, Brioux-sur-Boutonne and Villefollet. Belleville is 29km South East of Niort.

### **Bessines**

Situated at the entrance to the Marais Poitevin, near Niort, Bessines is a village alongside the Vieille Sèvre river and the Jaron mill race. It's three ports are the gateway to the Marais Poitevin, the first canals of the Marais Poitevin can be found here, lined with pollarded ash trees.

The village developed from the domain of Bassinus, a rich landowner of the Gallic-Roman period. He gave his name to the locality. The inhabitants are called les Bessinois. The Romanesque church of St-Caprais is a stopping place on the road to Compostelle.

The commune has been the home of many famous artists and cinema artists of whom Jean Richard is the most well known. He is the only actor to have played all the roles of Georges Simenon's Maigret. He was born in Bessines in 1921, at Pierre Levée manor (private property dating from the XVth century).



#### **À VOIR / MUST SEE:**

- St Caprais church

### **Le Beugnon**

Le Beugnon is a little village in the township of Coulonges-sur-l'Autize part of the district of Niort.

The Town Hall is approximately 200 metres above sea level. The population of Le Beugnon was 362 in 1999, 335 in 2006 and 331 in 2007. The inhabitants of Le Beugnon are known as Beugnonnais or Beugnonnaises.

The river Thouet has its source on the commune of Le Beugnon, near the farm at la Pointerie. Not far away can be found the source of the Sèvre Nantaise river and that of some of the tributaries of the river Autize, including the Saumont. The museum and natural site of the Sources de Gâtine, "Benina Onda" ("blessed waters") allows you to

understand the importance of our daily actions in the management of water.

#### **À VOIR / MUST SEE:**

- Chicheville, a 14th century village, meeting place for the Resistance during the 2nd World War, with a landing area for parachute drops and hiding place for weapons and arms.
- Saint-Maurice church
- The grotto called Notre-dame-de-Lourdes to which processions used to be held.
- The source of the Loupe stream
- The valley of the stream of the Wolf's fountain
- The ancient Gallic Roman road "chemin des Chaussées"
- The Clochard apple trees
- The dominial forest of La Boucherie
- The numerous view points of "Little Switzerland" (la "Petite Suisse") from Le Beugnon.



### **Bilazais**

Since 1973 Bilazais has been joined to the commune of Oiron. The mayor of Bilazais is therefore one of the deputies of the mayor of Oiron and has a seat on Oiron Town Council.

#### **À VOIR / MUST SEE:**

- The Church of St Radegonde with its 12th century choir.

### **Boismé**

The inhabitants of Boismé are Boisméens or Boisméennes. The land is quite heavy clay and rather acidic and so used for animal rearing – sheep and cattle.

The history of Boismé goes back a long time. A document from 1028 mentions it under the name of Curtis de Bonniaco. At that time «Curtie» always described a place which was inhabited.

Mention is also made of a church which was dedicated to St Peter and which was already falling into ruins. Later on, different names can be found: Boisméum, Boymé, Boême, Boesmé (the name found on the Napoleonic land register).

Saint-Mérault's Church where the tomb of the Saint can be found, still existed in the 17th century and the tomb was the object of public veneration.

During the Vendée wars, in 1792, Louis de Salgues de Lescure, one of the anti-revolutionary leaders, came to live in his castle at Clisson in Boismé. He was taken prisoner by the republicans and imprisoned in Bressuire with his family. He was liberated just in time to save him from execution, when the Vendée army took control of Bressuire a few days later.

The château de Clisson was set fire to and only the chapel survived (and can still be seen today). The present château was built on the site of the common lodgings of the old château.

During the Second World War, the allies dropped arms and weapons in two parachute drops on the nights of the 19th and 20th June 1943. The drops were made at "Bois Rocard". The message broadcast by the BBC giving information about the drops was "Le Roi dit à la Reine: Victoire" ("The King said to the Queen: Victory?").

#### **À VOIR / MUST SEE:**

- The chapel of the chateau de Clisson
- The remains of the chateau de Poyon
- The fortified farms of Gât, Corbin and la Guirère
- The remains of the Mills of La Guirère, ancient windmills overlooking the Thouet

The granite cliffs between Bas-Gourneau et la Guirère 2 ancient wash-houses – Saint Mérault is said to have performed some miracles at one of them.