



Above: St Jean Church, Marnes. © Wikipedia, Addio79

## MARNES

This small commune of the Deux-Sèvres is situated mid-way between Chinon, Parthenay, Poitiers and Saumur.

There is no doubt that at the end of the prehistoric period, the region of Marnes was already inhabited by man. As well as the areas of La Bataille and Le Chafaud, several other places on the commune have revealed traces of early settlements. Eg. walls and stones at Belliard, Les Grêles, La Croix du Gers and Le Moulin Neuf de Chandalloux.

The Roman road which crosses the town of Marnes linked **Limonium** (Poitiers) to **Portus Namnetum** (Nantes). At **Ensignon** (St Jouin de Marnes) another road left the Roman road to reach the town of **Juliomagus** (Angers).

The spread of Christianity came about with the fall of the Roman Empire. The Christians used existing pagan places of worship and progressively transformed them into Christian ones.

Two men were responsible for the Christianisation of the Poitou area, they were Martin and Hilaire. They spent their lives on the country roads of the Poitou countryside preaching the good word. Saint Hilaire was so used to using the Roman road that the locals call it the 'chemin de Saint-Hilaire'.

The numerous tombs and sarcophagus found on the territory lead us to suppose that the town of Marnes was, in the Middle Ages, an important cultural centre. There are not many necropolises of this type in the area and the ones which have been found are of much lesser importance.

Until about 1550, French Protestantism was open to all the different currents of the Reform. Once Calvinism took hold, the protestant doctrine was defined and the spread of protestantism was favoured. Lords of the land converted and along with them some of the lesser nobles and peasants. In order to defend this new faith, the Huguenots formed a military structure led by the nobles. Protestantism sort of became the flag bearer for feudal bitterness. The death of Henri II and the instability of the throne was enough to start off the hostilities.

Admiral Coligny was not in a strong position. He abandoned the

siege of the town of Poitiers after defeat at Jarnac. He went to attack Chatellerault which was being attacked by the Duke of Anjou. But the future Henri III retreated to Chinon. Coligny therefore decided to take control of the crossing places on the Thouet and Dive rivers.

On September 30th 1569 at about 2am, Coligny and his army arrived on the plain at St Clair near Marnes. 300 horsemen and 200 arquebuse were sent on ahead. They came head on with the Catholic army and combat was inevitable. The battle took place between Moncontour, Douron, the gateway to Airvault and la Grimaudière. At that time the Dive valley was a dangerous marshy area. It was difficult to cross the Dive anywhere between Marnes and Montreuil Bellay and the only road which could really be called a road linked Moncontour to Airvault. The attack was short (about an hour) but very bloody. On the Protestant side between 6000 and 10000 men were killed or taken prisoner. The Catholics only lost 600. The Battle of Moncontour was a disaster for the Protestants.

After the battle Coligny retreated to Parthenay and then to Niort where he reassembled what was left of his army. Realising he could no longer stay in Poitou he decided to head for La Guyenne and wait for help from England.

### A VOIR / MUST SEE

- **Saint-Jean Baptiste Church**

The oldest parts of the church dates from the beginning of the XIIth century. Saint Jean Baptiste church was built on the foundations of much older buildings. The church has been listed as a historical monument since 1862.

The different sculptures that can be seen in the church do not all date from the same period. (Photo: wikipedia)

- **Le Four à pain / The Bread Oven**

Built over 200 years ago and standing in the centre of the village, near the river, the bread oven is in working order. It was restored between 2007 and 2010 by volunteers.

- **La carrière de Sous-les-Monts / Sous-les-Monts Quarry**

Mined by Colas company until 1998, the quarry was bought by the commune of Marnes with the help of the Conseil général and the Communauté de Communes. Its management has been entrusted to the Poitou Charentes natural species conservatory.



Photo: www.marnes.fr

## MASSAIS

The inhabitants of Massais are the Massaisiens and the Massaisiennes. The commune of Massais is in the North of the department of the Deux-Sèvres, 10km from Thouars and 30 km from Bressuire. It is situated on the borders of Anjou and Poitou, within the Saumur wine appellation area on the edge of the Bocage Bressuirais and the Plain of Thouars.

The river Argenton flows through the commune.

Massais is probably best known for its theme park and attractions at Parc de la Vallée. Children generally enjoy the attractions, which may not be up to the attractions at Disney but then tickets are a lot cheaper than Disney. The park is open over the summer months.

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