

The Vast,

an extract from Charles Birette's "le Val de Saire illustré"

The Vast is a charming clearing in the woods between Boutron, Pepinvast and Boisnet . It is one of the most picturesque landscape in Basse Normandie. Hills and woods, vales and dales, brooks and cascades, green meadows, barren moors , you name it. But artists hardly ever visit it, neither do tourists for man is a routine lover who doesn't deem a path is worth walking unless crowds have already trampled it.

Nowadays nobody questions the fact that the Vast was Father Michel Le Tellier's birthplace,-he was a Jesuit who eventually became Louis XVI's confessor at Father La Chaise's death. Moreri mistook Vire for his birth place, confusing the vales of Vire and the vales of the Vast. A careful examination reveals that Father François Le Tellier whose influence on the great king in religious matters is still diversely appreciated, was actually born in le Vast, at the skirt of the Boutron woods on october 16th, 1643.

The church

at le Vast must be ranked as one of the most beautiful monument of the Vale of Saire. The chancel dates from the beginning of the 15th century. The vaulted roof is a series of intercrossing pointed arches that starts on slender columns . The straight is adorned with a beautiful stained glass window composed of four panels, one of the most particular feats of the area.

An earlier church stood there till the first half of the 19th century. In 1863 Father Anger, with the help of the local mayor Mr Fontenilliat, had its nave, aisles and tower rebuilt the way we can still see them today, in the very simple yet very pure 13th century style with undivided lancet windows. As for the two storey bell tower light comes into the second floor from two slender pointed arched windows. The tower is topped with a spire and four turrets

From the mill to the cascades:

at the end of the 18th century, Mr Philippe Fontenilliat, a merchant from Rouen, bought land in le Vast in order to set up an industrial compound. There were four mills on the land, two were used to grind wheat, two to make paper as papermakers had settled there early in the 18th century.

Mr Fontenilliat destroyed three of the mills and brought their waterfalls together to the fourth he had kept. He thus managed to get a single 7 meter waterfall, which amounted to the added strength of 150 horses. He also had a 1400 meter long canal dug, and planted trees which add to the beauty of today's landscape.

The factory was built in 1803, it gave work to 600 workers and produced up to 1500 pounds of cotton a day. The local population increased up to 1706 inhabitants in 1831. There are only 500 today (in 1932)

The manufacturer's sons took over their father's business then his grand daughter married Hippolyte de la Germonière, a man from the Tours area who remained the only one at the head of the mill in 1858. He brought his son into the business and both carried on till 1886 when they gave up after the fatal treaties in 1860.

The mill was destroyed between 1891 and 1892. The ancient house was turned into a delightfull mansion which suits the harmony of the fresh romantic vale

The memory of the cotton mill comes back to life among the cascades that can be admired from the road through a charming undergrowth. They are the result of the changes designed by Gombaz and C°, the establishment responsible for the creation of the cascades at the bois de Boulogne in Paris. They look so natural since the rocks have been so artfully placed and the endless flow of water is a delicious purl to the visitor's ears.

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