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Discovering the Clermontais
Fontès



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COMMUNAUTÉ DE COMMUNES  DU CLERMONTAIS

Welcome to the Clermontais, Pays Cœur d'Hérault.

The Communauté de Communes du Clermontais is actively engaged in promoting the heritage which mirrors its historical and cultural identity. This little guide will help you to discover the natural patrimony and the monuments and buildings of its community members : FONTÈS

Have a good time and see you very soon !

SOME HISTORY

The village of Fontès which is situated near the Céressou volcano (just over 679 ft high) overlooks the valley of the river Boyne.

Fontès gets its name from the word "font" which in Latin and Occitan is a spring, or a fountain. The region, inhabited from prehistoric times, is especially enhanced by the remains of the great Gallo-Roman settlement to be found at the foot of the Céressou (Les Pradesses, Carlenças). In the 10th century Fontès was a part of the administrative court system (*viguerie*) run by Béziers in the region of Cabrières.

The implantation of a castle before 1080 resulted in a gradual reorganization of the village around the medieval fortification. From this time, the gates that give access to the village and its different parts are still in existence in the topography of today.

In addition to the magnificent 14th century church listed in the inventory of Historical Monuments, the municipality of Fontès can count on its land the ruins of a second castle (the Chateau Mazers) first administered by the viscounts of Béziers then by the Guilhem family of Montpellier in the 12th century.

After which the village spread out along the roads to the South and the North West.

It is only at the end of the 19th century that the space in the middle with the war memorial was cleared so as to create a link between the boulevard Jules Ferry, the centre of the village and the road to Cabrières.



BUILDINGS AND NATURAL HERITAGE DISCOVERY CIRCUIT

- ① The War Memorial and Town Hall
- ② The Clock Tower
- ③ Medieval fortifications, *rue de la ville* and its gates
- ④ The volcano Céressou
- ⑤ The castle
- ⑥ « La Font Granda »
(the Big Fountain)
- ⑦ The church of Saint Hippolyte
- ⑧ « La Font Vieilha »
(the Old Fountain)
- ⑨ The Wine-making Cooperative
- ⑩ Girl's School - 1983



1 THE WAR MEMORIAL

At the Fontès local council meeting on 27th November 1920 it was decided to erect a War Memorial in the centre of the village to commemorate the 1914–1918 war (34 souls from Fontès fell in the Fields of Honour). Work finished on the 20th February 1923 and the inauguration took place during the summer of the same year. Stone from Lens was used for the headstone; the supporting steps are in granite.



1 THE TOWN HALL

The Town Hall of Fontès took office in the disused church of St Jean twenty years before the Revolution where it stayed for over a century.

On the 14th August 1893 the municipality acquired two blocks of buildings, one belonging to Madame Rouvière and the other to Monsieur Malavialle. It was on this site that the present Town Hall was constructed. On the ground floor of the future building it was decided on the 30th August 1893 to install a Post Office and an office for the tax collector.

The City Hall was built by the Paul Cahuzac Company from Béziers. Work was started on the 15th February 1895 under the municipality of Adrien Feret, the Mayor. It was not until the 3rd December 1905 that the work was declared to be completed by the local council.

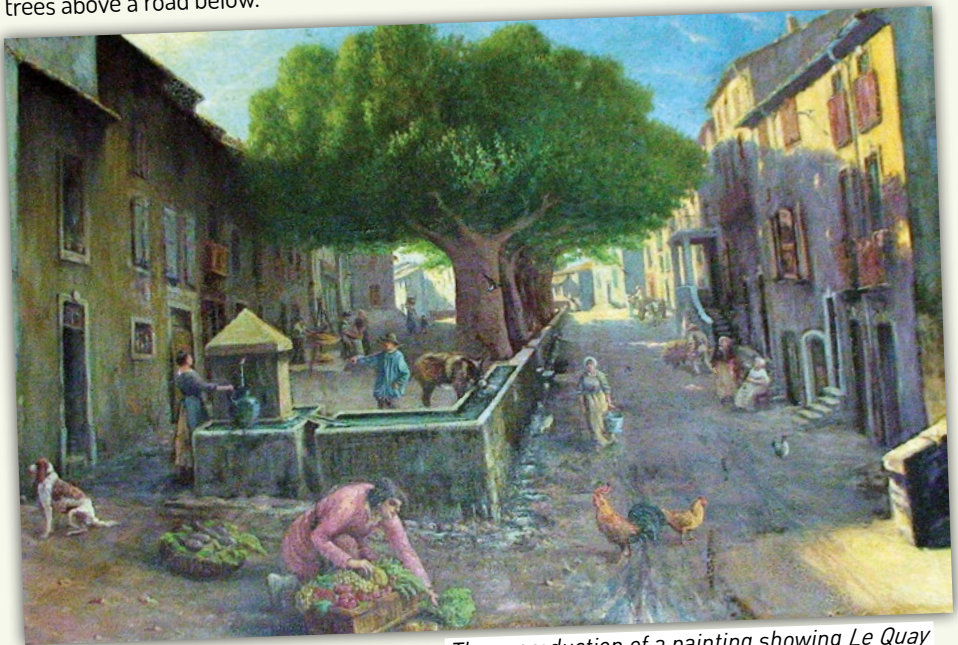


A remarkable facade for two reasons

1. The statue of Marianne decorating the top of the gate wears a Phrygian head-dress underlining the revolutionary origins of a generous Republic (garlands of fruits of abundance).

2. The Post Office being on the ground floor was a sign that the municipality was concerned about the services rendered to the people.

The area stretching out in front of the Town Hall was called "Le Quay" (the platform). A wall with troughs built against it received water from the fountain, to support an area of planted trees above a road below.



The reproduction of a painting showing Le Quay

In front of the Town Hall stands the Clock Tower which was the belfry of the ancient parish church. A gate to the medieval castle was at the beginning of this road.

② THE CLOCK TOWER

Tradition associates this building with the belfry of the ancient church of Saint John which seems to have been the chapel of the castle of Fontès.

The *rue de l'Horloge* as a vestige of medieval Fontès retains its vaulted passageway (under the tower). A clock was put there in 1687. In 1734 the vaulted entrance was reinforced as shown by the date engraved in stone. Also visible under the vault are traces of a bakery with the inscription « Bakery year IV of the R^pM ».

Even though during the Revolution four bells had been removed from Fontès, the clock tower bell was kept, and then replaced in 1818 by two new bells. The tower was renovated in 1834 and 1858.

In 1998 the Belfry was entirely restored, following the replacement of the clock in 1994.



To the right, the stairway in the road brings to memory numerous similar constructions that were demolished at the end of the 20th century so as to allow easier traffic circulation. Others will be visible during the course of the visit.

③ THE MEDIEVAL WALL, A ROAD IN THE TOWN AND THE GATES

In the Middle Ages, Fontès was a fortified village inscribed in manuscripts that date back to the 11th century.

Perched on a hill and protected from the north by the castle, the village to the south (at the level of today's *Avenue de la République*) was closed off by almost 7 ft thick ramparts and ditches. It was made up of three access gates, one being the gate to the rue de la *Brèche*.

The *rue de la Tour*, called in the past the *rue du Porche de la Ville*, allowed access to the village through a vaulted passageway which is still in existence today.

The *rue de la Ville* which is the centre of the medieval village with its small squares and its narrow twisted streets has preserved its old houses built on huge vaulted rooms that run along the narrow street.





The *rue de la Liberté* leads out to the castle's terraces with a stunning view over the ancient volcano of Ceressou.

④ THE CERESSOU VOLCANO

The Ceressou (or Celessou) volcano of Fontès overlooking the surrounding plains is situated in the axis of the shifting plioquaternaire. In geological terms it corresponds to an ancient volcano which is part of the mountain range of the *Massif Central*. Emerging from the sea that covered the region its crater has been full for a very long time.

In the past the flow of lava covered the ground in *hermes* (name given in the Midi to land which was infertile or difficult to cultivate) and woodlands.

Towards the end of the 19th century, vestiges of the fork-like gallows (a contraption of several pillars that the feudal lords erected to hang the condemned) were still visible, they were raised on the sides of the mountains, still clearly seen from the castle terraces.

After the gates of the *Castrum* when going down into the *rue des artisans* and *la rue du Capelan-Mort* on the right at the corner of a building is a turret, perhaps a vestige of an ancient fortification.

5 THE CASTLE

The old castle of Fontès overlooking the valley of the Boyne and directly facing the Ceressou volcano has always enjoyed a panoramic view, which made it a stronghold of strategic defence for the village and the road to Cabrières.

The early squires of Fontès were allied with the powerful lordships of Cabrières and were most likely dependant on the Viscount of Béziers. During the tormented time of the Albigensian Crusade the castle was handed down to the lords of Lodève, and then through marriage to the family Vissec de Latude. Documented since the end of the 11th century nothing remains of the primitive castle that had been reconstructed and revamped in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Still in existence today in the *Plan du Château*, it was flanked by a defensive bastion (known as a barbacane). From the terraces (now called *Promenade du Château*), access was by an immense double staircase with two identical gates in the style of Henry II, and by two towers, one of which had been destroyed. Few of the ancient architectural elements of the castle still subsist apart from the fine mullion windows.

N.B. : The castle and the *Plan du Château* is now private property. Not open to visitors.

6 « LA FONT GRANDA » (THE BIG FOUNTAIN)

Before the Revolution, a fountain, which is no longer in existence, flowed on the other side of the road.

The fountain of today is part of a monumental circular fountain which had 4 cast-iron *griffoules* (Occitan word which means spout or fountain), erected in 1884 in the village square to replace the one which provided water to the drinking troughs and the wash house.

Later on the fountain was moved to the place it stands in today because it was obstructive to traffic through the village square. Only two of the *griffoules* still remain today.

Under the shade of the plain trees, *La Font Granda* offers freshness and perpetual music. Although not qualified as drinking water, there are many who would drink nothing else.





7 THE CHURCH OF SAINT HIPPOLYTE

The primitive church of the village was attached to the Clock Tower.

It was in 1299 that Guiraud of Lodève, Lord of Fontès, placed the first stone of the current church which was built to a simple plan: a double-span nave, extended by an apse in five pieces, framed by two side chapels. It took until 1340 to complete the work.

This monumental construction measures almost 100 ft in length and over 42 ft in width with a 49 ft high nave. Two side chapels open onto the first bay. At the entrance door the arches of the gate are supported by pillars decorated with sculptures of human heads and foliage. Inside, two sculptures bring to mind the events in the life of the prophet Daniel and a delicately sculpted frieze adorns the *chevet*.

For a long time the church was isolated outside the main village, but the spread of modern housing has brought it back into the centre of the community.

8 « LA FONT VIEILHA » (THE OLD FOUNTAIN)

Before the revolution there were three fountains in the village. The “Font de la Plaça” was in the village square on the left of the Clock Tower. The “Font Granda” was below the *rue de la Calade*, next to the cross. The third is this one.

The arch which marks its place was not walled up and water was taken from a trough built under a vault. Later on a pump was installed and this was finally removed in 1933.



To the north of the village was a spring called “La Gloriette” that today feeds into the fountain which is just next to the Town Hall. The “Font Vieilha” was probably fed into by the same spring.

9 THE WINE-MAKING COOPERATIVE

The first installations of the wine-making Cooperative were situated at the level of the drawbridge which still exists. The modern installations, a cellar for aging wine and a hall for stocking were built recently so as to accompany the success of the wines developed here, especially the rosé.

10 THE GIRLS' SCHOOL, 1903

In 1900, under Adrien Ferret, it was decided to build a school for girls, at the expense of the municipality. The land was bought in 1901 and the project was handed over to the architect Paul Michel, to be built by Alric, master builder of Fontès.

The school had two classes in the beginning. A third was to be added in one of the two yards. The teachers lived in the wing sections.

A clock, made by the Odelet-Cadet du Jura workshops had been installed with a chime on the hour and every half hour.

The building, inaugurated on 3rd June 1903, today has mixed classes and is a good example of the kind of public architecture that decorates secular French primary schools in accordance with Jules Ferry's educational rules.

DISCOVER FONTES DIFFERENTLY

■ **Rando Cards**, with 2 itineraries for hiking labelled FF Randonnée 34, to use when discovering the history, patrimony and local produce :

“Vineyards and volcanoes”

Duration : 3hrs 30. Distance : 7.7 miles

Level of difficulty : average.

“Le Céressou”

Duration : 2hrs. Distance : 3.7 miles.

Level of difficulty : easy.

Available in the Tourist Offices of the Clermontais or download from internet site : www.clermontais-tourisme.fr

■ **The booklet « These walls that talk to us »**, takes an unprecedented stroll into geological times so as to understand more about the rocks used to build and decorate the habitations, squares and monuments. Making the walls talk is walking in the Clermontais villages while observing the old facades, roads and narrow footpaths, the cul-de-sacs, the way the doors and windows are framed and the engraved porches. It means becoming aware of how useful rocks have been to mankind in the construction of buildings that shelter, protect and house.

On sale in all the Tourist Offices in the Clermontais.

■ **Guided tours with the Tourist Office's official visitor's guide.** Explore the richness of the natural patrimony and architecture of the Clermontais and take a plunge into the history of a land that has character.

Information and Reservations : 04 67 96 23 86 or tourisme@cc-clermontais.fr

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Seasonal Offices

At Mourèze, Octon and the lake Salagou,
the shores of Clermont l'Hérault
and portable phone access at Cabrières, Fontès and Paulhan

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