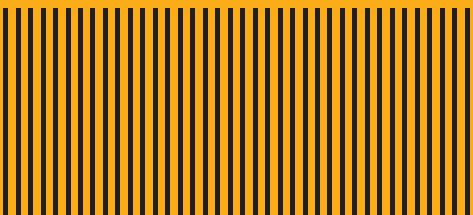


JOURNEY THROUGH THE CONFOLENTAIS



VILLES
& PAYS
D'ART &
D'HISTOIRE

EDITORIAL

Since its certification in November 2008, the Pays d'art et d'histoire du Confolentais has been presenting the distinctive character of its region through various activities. The Pays d'art et d'histoire has relied on the heritage inventory carried out between 2003 and 2006 by the regional cultural inventory service. This inventory has enabled elected officials and inhabitants of the territory to better understand and appreciate the local heritage, and more particularly the vernacular heritage. Very much represented and relatively well preserved, this heritage is one of the strengths of the Confolentais. After 10 years of application of the convention, the Pays d'art et d'histoire is working on its renewal and, more precisely, on its extension.

Indeed, the Confolentais is part of a larger whole, the Charente Limousine, from a historical point of view as well as a heritage, landscape or even memorial standpoint. It therefore appears relevant to extend the Pays d'art et d'histoire to this spatial scale. While this extension is a focal point, it should not, however, make us lose sight of the present certified area.

We therefore invite you to (re) discover what has enabled the Confolentais to become a Pays d'art et d'histoire ... while waiting to discover, who knows, the Pays d'art et d'histoire de Charente Limousine.

Cover page

Wall paintings by Félix Périn in the church of Saint-Benoît in Ansac-sur-Vienne

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View of the river Vienne from the château of Saint-Germain, Confolens.

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1. On the chalky soils to the west, made up of plateaux and plains, there are large cultivated areas as in Alloue.

© Regional Cultural Inventory Service - Raphaël Jean / CCCL.

2. Example of a raw earth building in Oradour-Fanais. Here, a barn-stable at a place called La Betoulle.

© CCCL.



THE COUNTRY AND ITS LANDSCAPES

SET BETWEEN THE AQUITAINE BASIN AND THE MASSIF CENTRAL, THE CONFOLENTAIS OFFERS PRESERVED AND VARIED LANDSCAPES.

TWO LARGE GEOLOGICAL BASINS

The Confolentais area, and by extension Charente Limousine, is shared between two geological basins. The lands of the West are sedimentary lands attached to the north of the Aquitaine basin. Limestone dominates in this area. The lands of the East are attached to the crystalline lands of the Massif Central. The subsoil is mainly granite. The Vienne and Charente basins mark the limit of these two geological zones. Each area has its typical material that can be found in buildings.

THE LIMESTONE LANDS OF THE WEST

Characterized by low-lying plateaux and valleys, these lands have favoured the development of cereal crops and polyculture. There are also many woods, such as chestnut groves. The river Charente and its tributaries dominate this part of Confolentais area. The limestone outcrops present in the area have been exploited in different forms : the stone quarry in Benest and in the valley of the Or and the production of lime. Even silver lead mines were operated in the municipalities of Alloue and Ambernac until the end of the 19th century.

The rural architecture in these lands has been conditioned by agricultural activities.

Many barns can be seen there with facades on gutter walls, of modest dimensions, used for the

storage of grain and straw.

THE GRANITE LANDS OF THE EAST

Unlike the west, the landscape consists of steeper hills. It is also here, in Montrollet, that the highest point of the Charente is located (368 m). The river Vienne and its tributaries meander through deep and sometimes steep valleys. Granite, although widely used in construction, did not lead to the creation of quarries.

It is in this zone that the breeding of cattle, sheep and, to a lesser extent, goats, developed. These activities are reflected in the landscape through the presence of meadows and pastures. Rural buildings in this area are usually barns coupled with stables, or barns alone. Today, with the evolution of agriculture, there is also cultivated land.

THE PRESENCE OF POCKETS OF CLAY

The surface erosion of the limestone or granite made it possible to release pockets of clay in various places of the area. The most important ones are located in Abzac / Oradour-Fanais, in and around Benest and near Saint-Maurice-des-Lions.

These pockets were exploited locally and led to the creation of tile factories, brickyards or even pottery workshops. Clay is used in



constructions in different forms : raw clay mainly in Oradour-Fanais and baked clay.

THE PREDOMINANCE OF WATER

The Confolentais has a dense hydrographic network, with the predominance of two rivers : the Vienne and the Charente. The river Vienne has its source on the Millevaches plateau (19). It becomes a tributary of the Loire at Candes-Saint-Martin (37). It crosses the region from South to North. The Vienne and its tributaries mark the granite landscape of the East by deep and sometimes steep valleys.

The river Charente has its source in Chéronnac (87) and flows into the Atlantic Ocean between Port-des-Barques and Fouras (17). But here it looks like a narrow stream. The river and its tributaries follow North-West / South-East oriented faults, resulting from the contact of limestone and granite zones, in flared valleys.

These numerous rivers required the construction of bridges and culverts. Likewise, they have enabled the development of a specific architecture linked to the use of water : structures used for economic purposes (mills, dams), buildings necessary for the supply of drinking water (fountains, wells, pumps or open-air wash houses), etc.

A PROTECTED SITE : THE ISSOIRE VALLEY

The Issoire, a tributary of the Vienne, has its source in Blond (87). In Charente Limousine, the river crosses the municipalities of Brillac, Esse, Saint-Germain-de-Confolens (Confolens) and Lessac. The valley of the Issoire is very deep and winds through many meanders that are often inaccessible. Recognized for the richness of its fauna and flora, the valley has in turn been protected under the 1930 law on natural sites and classified as a Nature 2000 zone. It is thus one of the natural and semi-natural European sites to be protected. It covers 508 hectares and has nine species and seven rare habitats of community interest. Also used as a catchment area, it supplies water to 19 municipalities. The dam built at Saint-Germain-de-Confolens (Confolens) has made it possible to build up a drinking water reserve of 750,000 m³.



2

1. In the East, the steeper granite soils have seen the development of livestock farming as in Montrollet.

© Regional Cultural Inventory Service – Gilles Beauvarlet / CCCL.

2. The Vienne, the main river in the region, crosses the Confolentais from South to North, passing through the sub-prefecture : Confolens.

© CCCL.

3. The Issoire valley is an exceptional site classified Natura 2000 and a catchment area for drinking water.

© CCCL.



3

THE COUNTRY OVER THE CENTURIES

LONG DISPUTED BETWEEN THE DIOCESES OF ANGOULÊME, LIMOGES AND POITIERS, THE CONFOLENTAIS WAS CONSTITUTED ONLY IN 1790.

HUMAN OCCUPATION IN PREHISTORY AND ANTIQUITY

Although there are few traces in the Confolentais area, man has been present there since prehistoric times. A hunter-gatherer camp in Hiesse and several menhirs and dolmens in the East (Esse or Montrollet for example) bear witness to this.

Antiquity is also a poorly understood period. The dense road network suggests a significant human presence : the Via Agrippa (Lyon-Saintes via Limoges) which runs through the region or the crossroads at Ambernac, with the Angoulême-Argenton-sur-Creuse and Périgueux-Poitiers roads. However, the sites identified are few in number : some “villae” and fortified “camps” sometimes called “Camp de César”. Archaeological excavations were carried out at one of them, the Robadeau camp in Montrollet, in the 1980s. It is believed to be an aristocratic farm established in the 1st century BC.

A MOST COVETED AREA IN THE MIDDLE AGES

If before the year 1000, the territory remained well away from the great political centres, from the 10th century it became a much coveted area. Its strategic position on the

Vienne crystallized the ambitions of several great lords : the counts of Poitiers and the Marche, the viscount of Limoges and local lords like that of Chabanais, who ruled Confolens. The town was also besieged several times in the 11th century. The Château de Saint-Germain, meanwhile, was one of the seven baronies of the county of the Marche. At the same time as these clashes, churches and several priories (Alloue, Benest, etc.) attached to the abbey of Lesterps or Charroux were built throughout the area.

During the Hundred Years War, the châteaux of Champagne-Mouton and Saint-Germain were attacked and the village of Lesterps was occupied one night by the Black Prince. From 1360 to 1373, the area became an English possession. The Confolentais found itself very impoverished.

Finally the Wars of Religion was to leave traces since between 1568 and 1570, the castles of Confolens and Saint-Germain were taken in turn by Protestant and Catholic troops. It was also during this period that Lesterps Abbey was looted and burnt down (1568).

THE TIME OF ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

The 17th and 18th centuries were times of renewal, both religiously and economically.



1. The Menhir of Repaire is one of the rare traces of Prehistory in the Confolentais area.

© Regional Cultural Inventory Service - Émilie Moinot / CCCL.

2. The abbey church of Saint-Pierre in Lesterps, with its 43m bell tower-porch, is the largest religious building in the Confolentais area.

© CCCL.

Catholic foundations were multiplying, like the three convents in Confolens. Economic prosperity was particularly driven by tanneries. And families which became wealthy in this area built many town houses. While this period is more difficult to assess in rural areas, we know that many manor houses, seats of local fiefdoms, were constructed in the area.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE BIRTH OF THE CONFOLENTAIS

With the French Revolution, the Confolentais area became a single territorial unit. Previously, it was divided into three elections (Angoulême, Confolens and Niort), themselves attached to the generalities of Limoges and Poitiers.

With the creation of the department of Charente in 1790, discussions began in the Constituent Assembly between the provinces of Angoumois and Poitou.

Finally, the 25 current municipalities were divided between the cantons of Champagne-Mouton, Confolens North and South.

THE RISE IN THE 19TH CENTURY

In the 19th century, industrial activities linked to water and clay developed. Agricultural

production was increasing and markets were held every month, the most important being in Confolens and Saint-Germain.

Having become a sub-prefecture, Confolens built public buildings illustrating its status : sub-prefecture, court, prison. New roads were opened as well as three railway lines linking Confolens to Roumazières (1887), Ruffec (1901) and Angoulême (1912-1913). This period of prosperity resulted in a population peak of 27,500 inhabitants.

A PRESERVED AREA FIGHTING ISOLATION

With world conflicts, and the decline of certain activities, the territory is now experiencing demographic decline. The Confolentais area currently has around 13,000 inhabitants. The main sectors of activity are agriculture, livestock and construction. Lying well away from major communication routes, it remains relatively isolated.

However, thanks to its unspoiled landscapes and heritage, it attracts tourists and nature lovers.

1. The church of Esse is an example of a building with a polygonal apse. It is a sign of the movement to raise the height of churches in the 14th and 15th centuries.

© CCCL.

2. Built in the 16th century, the château of Praisnaud in Ambernac belonged to the Babaud-Praisnaud, an influential Confolentais family.

© Regional Cultural Inventory Service – Gilles Beauvarlet / CCCL.



1



2

FROM ONE MONUMENT TO ANOTHER

**FROM THE ROMANESQUE CHURCH TO THE 21ST CENTURY BUILDING,
THE CONFOLENTAIS HAS A RICH AND PRESERVED HERITAGE.**

MENHIRS AND DOLMENS

The Confolentais has several menhirs and dolmens in Ansac-sur-Vienne, Esse, Hiesse, Lessac, Manot, Montrollet or Saint-Christophe.

Among the most remarkable, let us mention the dolmen of Sainte-Madeleine in Lessac, transformed into a chapel or the dolmen of Périssac in Esse. M. Gontier, the sub-prefect at the time, used part of its table for his wife's tomb in 1884. The artist Jean Teilliet used the other part to build the monument to the dead of Esse near a remarkable tree known as Sully's lime tree.

ROMANESQUE CHURCHES

In the Middle Ages, the Romanesque churches increased in the area. They are of modest size and generally built on the plan of a single nave. The Confolentais also has several priories (for example Alloue or Benest) and an abbey : Lesterps.

The appearance of the churches differs between the West (churches with a bell tower and a flat apse) and the East (churches with a polygonal apse). Churches in the West are mostly smaller than those in the East. Apart from a few portals (Champagne-Mouton or Confolens) and sculpted capitals, the decoration of the churches remains limited

due to the use of granite.

The buildings underwent a first wave of modifications after the Hundred Years War. The churches of Brillac or Manot were fortified and others, as in Esse, were raised. A second wave of work was launched in the 19th century and affected all the churches. Many bell towers and vaults were reworked, many stained glass windows adorned the buildings and some churches were even completely rebuilt (Pleuville, Ambernac). Despite this, there are very beautiful Romanesque examples in the Confolentais region, such as the abbey in Lesterps and its bell tower-porch from the 11th century.

CASTLES AND MANOR HOUSES

Whether defensive or residential, castles and manors dot the territory. While several castles were built in the Middle Ages (Confolens, Saint-Germain or Champagne-Mouton), most of the manor houses date from the 16th and 17th centuries. Seats of small fiefdoms, they are distinguished by the presence of dovecotes, external or partially external staircase towers and more ornamentation on the lintels or the frames.

In the 19th century, several castles, of medieval inspiration, were rebuilt : Boisbuchet in Lessac and La Grollière in Pleuville.



RURAL HERITAGE

The rural built heritage is particularly well preserved. The inventory identified 44 dates from the 17th century on this type of building, in particular towards Montrollet and Saint-Christophe.

Among the remarkable houses are the houses with an external staircase called *maisons à balet*. These craftsmen's houses had the workshop on the ground floor and the living area upstairs.

There are several types of farms and barns. The farm with scattered buildings is the most frequent organization. But there are also farms with different adjoining buildings attached to each other and constructions bringing together under the same roof the house and the barn (known as a linear plan farm and a massed plan farm). There are two types of barn : those with a facade on the gable wall (often prior to the 19th century) and those with a facade on the gutter wall. Stables integrated into barns were generally intended for cattle, sheep or draft horses. Other isolated buildings were intended for pigs and called "pig roofs".

Finally, the many bread ovens remind us that bread was the staple food of the population. There are several types : free-standing bread oven, associated with an outbuilding or attached to a house.

CIVIL AND URBAN HERITAGE : CONFOLENS

The town at the centre of the Confolentais area developed in the Middle Ages between the Vienne and its tributary, the Goire, in several districts : Saint-Maxime on the right bank, Saint-Barthélemy on the left bank and Saint-Michel on the outskirts (right bank).

A veritable mosaic, Confolens has preserved buildings from all eras : the keep and the courthouse from the Middle Ages, the half-timbered houses from the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, the old convents (17th century), the town houses (from the 16th to the 18th century) and the characteristic buildings of the 19th century. This century is well represented with institutional buildings (sub-prefecture, courthouse), engineering structures (Pont Neuf and Pont du Goire) and buildings typical of the industrial revolution (station, covered market). It has also been able to integrate contemporary creation into its urban fabric with the EHPAD du pré de l'étang (care home), the gendarmerie and the hospital.



1. It took 18 horses to transport this piece of the Perissac dolmen to Mrs. Gontier's grave.

© Regional Cultural Inventory Service – Christian Rome / CCCL.

2. This *maison à balet* in Benest dates from the 15th or 16th century. It was the typical home of the craftsman.

© CCCL.

3. This bread oven, located in Chassiecq at a place called Chez Carlais, was restored at the end of the 2000s.

© Regional Cultural Inventory Service – Sylvie Coussot / CCCL.

4. In the 19th century, Confolens constructed several important public buildings such as the Palais de Justice, built between 1863 and 1868.

© Regional Cultural Inventory Service – Véronique Dujardin / CCCL.



THE DECORATION OF THE CHURCHES

THE CHURCHES OF THE CONFOLENTAIS OFFER A PANORAMA OF RELIGIOUS DECORATIONS, FROM ALTARPIECES TO WALL PAINTINGS.

THE SCULPTED DECORATIONS OF THE PORTALS

Due to the use of granite, a stone that is difficult to carve, many churches have simple decorations. Nevertheless, for certain elements such as the tympanums, bas-reliefs or some capitals, limestone was imported from the west. Thus, we find sculpted tympanums in Champagne-Mouton (theme of the Eucharist) and in Manot (Christ in Majesty). Bas-reliefs on the theme of the Lamb of the Resurrection are visible in Esse or at the church of Saint-Barthélemy in Confolens. Finally, in Saint-Maurice-des-Lions and Chassiecq, the portal is surmounted by a projecting band resting on sculpted modillions.

The portal itself has several forms. The portal with two pointed arches, of which there are many, appears in particular in Saint-Maurice-des-Lions, Manot or Esse. But one of the specificities of the area is to have portals in the Limousin style. Located in the former diocese of Limoges, they are characterized by an arch made up of several pointed arches and tori resting on capitals and columns. Brillac, the church of Saint-Maxime and the chapel of the Commanderie of Confolens have such portals.

THE SIDE CHAPELS OF THE 15TH AND 17TH CENTURIES

At the end of the 15th century, the Confolentais area experienced a resurgence of prosperity. During this period, some local lords decided to finance the construction of side chapels in churches, such as in Benest, Ansac-sur-Vienne, Le Vieux-Cérier and Saint-Barthélemy in Confolens. Usually with ribbed vaults with a keystone and sculpted bases, they sometimes contain the tomb of a nobleman. Thus, the north chapel of Notre-Dame d'Ansac-sur-Vienne houses the recumbent figures of François de Pontbriand, Lord of Villatte and butler to Francis I, and his wife Mathive Formier. These recumbent figures were restored a few years ago and have been classified as a historical monument as an object since 1941

ALTARPIECES AND TABERNACLES

These ensembles must underline the place of the sacrament of the Eucharist in the Catholic liturgy. They take the form of a carved piece of furniture, the tabernacle, and are sometimes supplemented by a decoration in the background, the altarpiece. Altarpieces and tabernacles were at their height in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Confolentais has several



1. The altarpiece-tabernacle of the chapel of the Poor Clares in Confolens, in gilded and sculpted stucco, dates from the end of the 17th century.

© Regional Cultural Inventory Service – Véronique Dujardin / CCCL.

2. Built in the 15th century in stone from Pressac, the tomb of François de Pontbriand is an example of Flamboyant Gothic art.

© Regional Cultural Inventory Service - Gilles Beauvarlet / CCCL.

examples of these ensembles, in Esse, Saint-Christophe or Saint-Maurice-des-Lions. The only homogeneous and perfectly preserved ensemble of the territory is in the chapel of the Poor Clares in Confolens. In carved and gilded wood, it has been classified as a historical monument as an object since 1912.

THE PAINTINGS

The churches in the Confolentais have many paintings on canvas. While the paintings range from the 17th to the 19th centuries, many come from orders from the State or the Second Empire.

Among the old paintings, often of good quality, we find in Lesterps a work from the 18th century showing the distress of Saint Peter after he had denied Christ. Some old masters' copies are still in place, such as the Virgin of the Rosary in Montrollet, a copy of a painting by Murillo.

In the 19th century, the State and the Second Empire sought to encourage artists. The Second Empire is also characterized by its desire to put the Catholic religion back at the heart of society. Following these public or imperial commissions, certain churches were assigned paintings, such as Saint-Maxime

(Christ in the Garden of Olives - copy of a painting by Jouvenet) and Saint-Barthélemy (The disciples at Emmaüs, The Virgin with Donors - copy of a painting by Van Dyck) in Confolens.

PAINTED DECORS

Painted decors are unfortunately rare in Confolentais. There are, however, two fine examples. The church of Saint-Martin in Oradour-Fanais has several painted decors including a scene of the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian. This decor, which dates from the 15th century, was restored between 2017 and 2018.

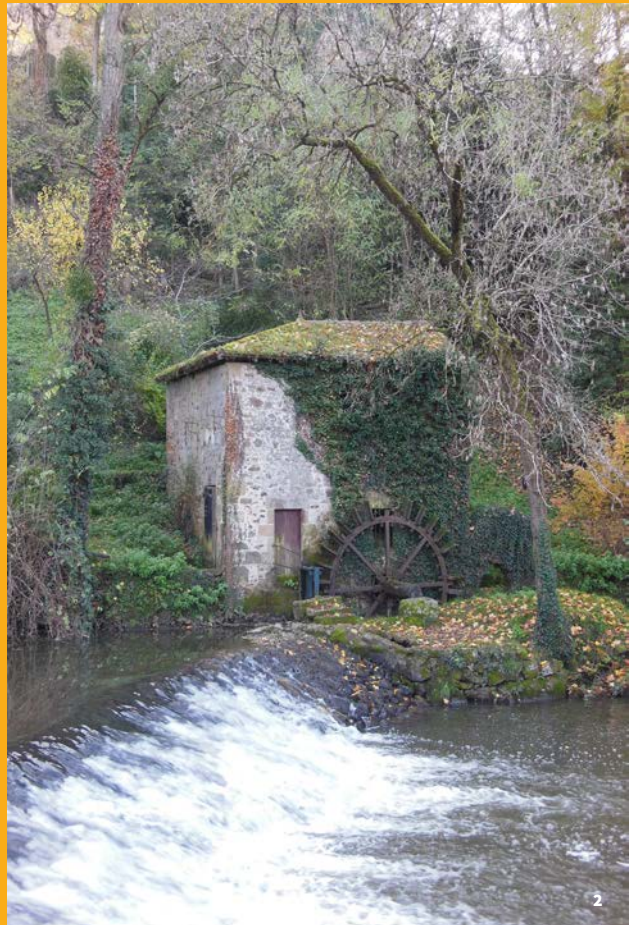
The church of Saint-Benoît and the Notre-Dame chapel in Ansac-sur-Vienne have an exceptional program of paintings created by Félix Périn (1835-1891). These works bear witness to a specific artistic current : the Nazarene movement. Being in favour of putting art at the service of religion and oriented towards the use of symbolism and allegory, the movement was represented by Victor Orsel. Other works related to this movement can be seen at Notre-Dame de Lorette in Paris or Notre-Dame de Fourvière in Lyon.

1. Dating from the 19th century, this stone bridge in Champagne-Mouton crosses one of the many waterways in the Confolentais area : the Argent.

© CCCL.

2. Used in particular to produce oil, the Goire mill in Confolens is one of the few that still has its wheel. The dam can be made out in foreground.

© CCCL.



WATER-RELATED HERITAGE

**THANKS TO ITS DENSE HYDROGRAPHIC NETWORK,
THE CONFOLENTAIS AREA HAS MANY CONSTRUCTIONS
RELATED TO THE EXPLOITATION OF WATER.**

BRIDGES AND CULVERTS

The numerous waterways, while useful for the development of economic activities, were also major natural obstacles. Also, in addition to fords, a number of bridges and culverts were built. Most of them, in wood and stone, are still visible on the tributaries of the Charente and the Vienne. The Vienne, for its part, had two bridges in the Middle Ages, at Confolens and between Saint-Germain-de-Confolens and Sainte-Radegonde (Lessac). Three new bridges were built over the Vienne in the 19th century at Confolens, Ansac-sur-Vienne and Manot. The last bridge built over the Vienne dates from the end of the 1980s, when the bypass was created at Saint-Germain-de-Confolens.

MILLS AND FLOUR MILLS

Hydraulic power has been used since the Middle Ages, with the construction of mills along waterways. Until under the Ancien Régime, they were mainly used for the production of flour (wheat and rye), oil (mainly walnuts) and tanbark for tanneries. Around 1830, there were 75 mills in the area, 26 in the limestone area and 47 in the granite area. This figure, although significant, was in decline compared to the end of the 18th century.

In the second half of the 19th century, some Confolens mills were transformed into

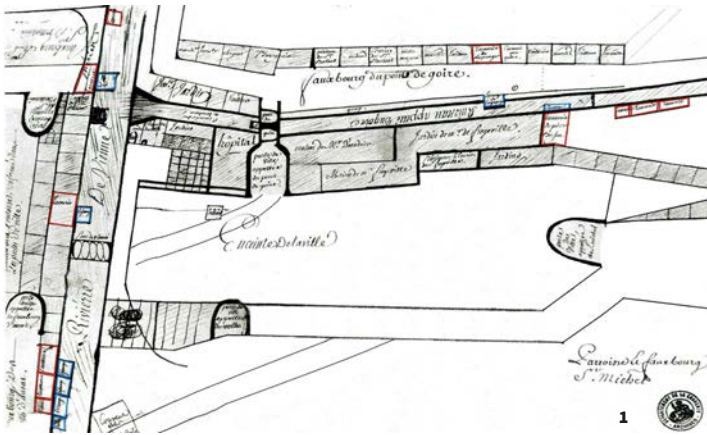
spinning mills and weaving workshops. But these workshops ceased their activities at the beginning of the Second World War. Finally, an original experiment was carried out on an old flour and oil mill : the Puygrenier mill in Confolens. In 1874, the owners transformed it into a straw paper factory. This factory, owned by the Société générale des papeteries du Limousin, was in operation until 1973. Today, part of the premises houses a micro-power station.

These examples of reconversion illustrate the possible uses of hydraulic power and the transition from craftsmanship to industry.

WATER CONTROL : DAMS AND MILL RACES

The installation of dams and mill races on the waterways goes hand in hand with the construction of the mills. Indeed, these works make it possible to channel the force of the water. But they modify the appearance and the flow of the rivers. Thus, at Confolens, a dam built on the Vienne raised the water level, making the ford near the Pont Vieux bridge impassable. Today, many dams are no longer maintained ; they are sometimes the only remaining traces of mills that have disappeared.

Some have been modified to promote the development of leisure activities. The dam



1



2

connected to the old Puygrenier mill in Confolens was equipped with a canoe pass in the mid-2010s.

Other modifications have been made to drain surface water : canals and pond dykes. Today, they generate strong activity in fishing and «green tourism».

TANNERIES

The tanneries developed in the Middle Ages in this land of stock farming. They were set up along the Vienne and its tributaries in Confolens, Saint-Germain-de-Confolens and the surrounding villages. There were tan mills on the river, for crushing oak bark, and basins for soaking (or softening) and for dyeing the skins.

The nuisances of the tanneries, smelly and polluting, were vilified in Confolens at the end of the 18th century. From 1841 onwards the tanneries went into slow decline and disappeared at the end of the 19th century. Unlike those in Saint-Junien, still in operation, those in the Confolentais area were neither modernized nor specialized in a particular type of production.

WATER FOR DOMESTIC USE

Water, essential to life and its activities, has always influenced the establishment and maintenance of human settlements.

Access to water and its domestic use have thus led to the appearance of specific buildings still present in the villages. Springs and fountains dot the land. Sometimes used as places of worship, the fountains have often been changed to facilitate access. Thus, they supply the communal open-air wash houses, most of which were built during the 19th century.

As for the wells, they were for a long time the only water supply points. Their shape varies depending on their location. Thus, the wells with a circular lip and metal structure are visible to the East, while to the West there are wells covered with wooden shelters. Some wells break the mould of the usual patterns, such as the lever well in Anzac-sur-Vienne.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, pumps were installed by municipalities, sometimes in place of wells. While they are no longer in operation today, there are still a few examples in Confolens and the surrounding area.



1. This partial map of the centre of Confolens shows the land occupied by the tanneries (in red) and their basins (in blue). It was used in a lawsuit argued between 1768 and 1775 before the senechals of Confolens and Angoulême.
© Charente County Archives.

2. Built in the 19th century, the Gaillard fountain in Brillac is distinguished by its monumental architecture unique in the Confolentais area.
© Regional Cultural Inventory Service – Christelle Ledoux / CCCL.

3. The Usières open-air wash house in Benest is a common form in the area : a spring associated with a masonry washing and rising basin.
© CCCL.

4. The Poumailloux well in Oradour-Fanais is an example of a well with a circular lip and a metal structure.
© Regional Cultural Inventory Service – Raphaël Jean / CCCL.

TRADITIONS AND KNOW-HOW

THE CONFOLENTAIS AREA, WITH ITS RICH AGRICULTURAL LAND, HAS FOCUSED BOTH ON ITS TRADITIONS AND INNOVATION TO SHOWCASE ITS MANY FACETS.

CATTLE AND SHEEP FARMING

The Confolentais area is known as a land of crop growing (in the West) and livestock farming (in the East), activities which have influenced its economy. The area specializes in the rearing of Limousin cows and sheep. It is also part of two appellation zones : “Le veau Limousin” (veal) (it is attached to Haute-Vienne) and “Agneau Poitou-Charentes” (lamb), an area which also includes the Montmorillonnais - Vienne and Gartempe. These appellations, governed by charters, recognize the quality and environmental approach of Confolentais livestock farming.

TILE WORKS - BRICKWORKS

The production of bricks and tiles has been a pillar of the local economy since the 19th century. It developed thanks to large deposits of clay in the northeast of the region. Around 1830, there were around thirty tile and / or brickworks. The ease of access to this material is found in buildings, especially in door and window frames.

The last active tile works in the Confolentais area stopped working in the 2010s : the Chambon tile works in Saint-Maurice-des-Lions (early 2010s) and the Malmanche tile works in Chardat-Abzac (2018).

PONNES

Confolentais clay was also used for the manufacture of *ponnes*. These terracotta vats were used for the “big wash” of laundry, or *bujée*, and were exported to the neighbouring counties.

This was a major economic activity in Benest where there were six potters and *ponne*-makers. The *ponnes* from Benest are recognizable by their gray colour and their decorations. The making of *ponnes* was often accompanied by the production of salting and other culinary pottery. There is only one kiln left in the town of Benest. It was built in 1869 and belongs to the municipality. *Ponnes*, on the other hand, are often reused as decorative elements in courtyards and gardens.

OSTENSIONS

This long-standing popular tradition in the Limousin is carried on in two Confolentais villages : Abzac and Esse.

The *ostensions* or expositions consist in presenting relics of saints to the faithful during processions. They take place every seven years, between Easter Monday and Pentecost Monday, and bring together members of the clergy, a guard of honour, the faithful and costumed extras. Between Easter and Pentecost, the relics are exhibited



1. The *ponne* from Benest owes its gray colour to the way the clay is fired (reduction).

© Regional Cultural Inventory Service - Raphaël Jean / CCCL.

2. The Confolens Festival of Arts and Traditions of the World, known throughout the world, attracts tens of thousands of people each year.

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in the church. The relics of Esse were brought in 1660 (Saint Hilaire, Sainte Victoire, Saint Florian, Saint Bon, Saint Natal, Saint Joachim and Sainte Sévère), completed in 1892 (Saint Stephen) and at an unknown date (Saint Anselme). The relics of Abzac arrived in 1669 (Saint Lucius and Saint Emeritus). The next year of ostensions will take place in 2023.

THE CONFOLENS FESTIVAL OF ARTS AND TRADITIONS OF THE WORLD

Created in 1958, the Confolens Festival of arts and traditions of the world is an internationally renowned event. Each year, during the second week of August, the Festival introduces the public to the traditions and folklore of countries around the world. Between dances, songs and events, the town beats to the rhythm of the world. Even today, the Confolens Festival remains the high point of the summer season. It unites the population of Confolens and every year attracts music lovers and tourists from all over the world.

CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL STRUCTURES

The Confolentais is a region of tradition, but it is also a pioneer in proposing contemporary cultural sites.

In Alloue is the Maison Maria Casarès, devoted

to theatrical promotion and creation, and to artists' residences. This centre occupies the former home of actress Maria Casarès (hence her name) and for several summers has offered a program combining afternoon tea and dinner shows. The second contemporary cultural site is the Boisbuchet estate in Lessac, managed by the International Centre for Cultural and Agricultural Research and Education (CIRECA). Its favourite themes are contemporary architecture and design. It promotes them through exhibitions or summer workshops bringing together artists, designers and architects from all over the world.

Finally, there is an unusual site in Esse : Coriobona - the Gallic village. The protohistoric reconstruction troupe "Les Gaulois d'Esse" has built a village based on the results of the latest archaeological and historical research. The troupe also test the hypotheses put forward by archaeologists, making the village a recognized experimental site for experts. Through activities, it also enables visitors to discover the life of the Gauls, their crafts and their traditions.

COMMUNAUTÉ DE COMMUNES DE CHARENTE LIMOUSINE



 Périimètre du Pays d'Art et d'Histoire du Confolentais

THE CONFOLENTAIS AREA

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE CONGOLENTAIS :

- Véronique DUJARDIN, Émilie MOINOT, Yann OURRY, *Le Confolentais : entre Poitou, Charente et Limousin*, Images du patrimoine n°243, Geste Éditions, 2007.

This brochure was produced thanks to the results of the heritage inventory, carried out between 2003 and 2006 by the Confolentais Community of Communes and the general inventory service for the cultural heritage of the current Nouvelle Aquitaine Region.

To contact the service : 05.49.36.30.07

<https://inventaire.poitou-charentes.fr>

GUIDED TOURS

Visits to the town of Confolens and the villages in the Confolentais area are possible all year round for groups, by reservation at the Charente Limousine Tourist Office, Confolens Tourist Information Point on 05.45.84.22.22

«O LAND OF GRANITE WHENE
BRIGHT SPRINGS OF WATER
GUSH AND BABBLE DOWN THE
HILLSIDES (..)»

Jeanne BRUNET, *Images de mon pays*, 1965.

The label “**Villes et Pays d’art et d’histoire**” (Towns and Regions of Art and History) is awarded by the Minister of Culture after consulting the National Council of Towns and Regions of Art and History. It is a recognition of regions, communes or groupings of communes which, aware of the challenges represented by the appropriation of their architecture and their heritage by the inhabitants, engage in an active process of knowledge and mediation.

The Heritage service, led by the architecture and heritage coordinator, organizes numerous actions to enable the inhabitants, young people and adults to discover the architectural and heritage riches of the Town / Region, with professional guides available for visitors.

For any information

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Nearby

In the NouvelleAquitaine Region : the towns of Bayonne, Bergerac, Bordeaux, Cognac, Dax, La Réole, Limoges, Pau, Périgueux, Rochefort, Royan, Saintes, Sarlat, Thouars ; the lands of GrandAngoulême, of Grand Châtellerault, of Grand Poitiers, of Grand Villeneuvois, of Hautes Terres Corrésiennes and Ventadour, of l’île of Ré, of Mellois in Poitou, of Monts and Barrages, of Parthenay-Gâtine, of Pyrénées béarnaises, of Saint-Jeande- Luz and Ciboure, Vézère and Ardoise, de Vienne et Gartempe.

