



EDITORIAL

Dear People of Montmaurin,

We have great pleasure in announcing a meeting for the presentation of the plan to raise the profile of our heritage set out by the **National Monuments Centre (CMN)**. This plan involving the three sites of Montmaurin: the Lassalles Villa, the St Hilliere site and the Interpretation Centre for the area to be situated in the former presbytery, will be presented at a **public meeting on Tuesday 3 March 2017 at 19h** in the village hall.

This meeting with the CMN will be an opportunity for everyone to find out about the project and the CMN's commitment to the Gallo-Roman sites and the archaeological collection.

Further to the development and conservation of these heritage sites, with the CMN and partner authorities, we are pursuing action to promote Culture and Tourism in the Comminges, including that of Montmaurin.

We should be delighted at such a concerted, collective involvement on behalf of our village. It is a widening of interest that had been long awaited, whilst the archaeological discoveries of Montmaurin and Lespugue have been known for decades.

Sincerely,

Silvia Belair, Le Maire

MONTMAURIN AND ARCHAEOLOGY...

The history of the commune has been marked by the interest shown by the forerunners of archaeological discovery in the riches of the past at Montmaurin /Lespugue. People such as Marcelin Boule, Abbé Henri Breuil, Count René de St-Périer and his wife Suzanne, Norbert Casteret, Louis Méroc, Raoul Cammas, Georges Delaplace, and Georges Fouet... took part either together or separately in excavations in our area (cf. photographs of excavations in last decades).

As a result of their observations, inventories and successive digs they discovered numerous archaeological remains which date from the oldest palaeolithic to later historical periods including the medieval site of Le Castet, a period about which little had been known till then.



Some details about the earlier searches :

Louis Méroc with **Georges Delaplace** had developed a method of excavation called “carroyage” which allows the position of remains within an archaeological site to be recorded, based on the use of Cartesian coordinates within an orthonormal reference point. This method is widely used nowadays on archaeological digs. Thus a discovery only has any sense after a study of the environment of the site (archaeological layers, sediments....) allowing things to be dated.

Under the direction of Louis Méroc archeological digs at the caves of Montmaurin were carried out between 1947 and 1962, representing a particular interest so far as knowledge of the earlier Stone Age is concerned. Among other remains was the pre-Neanderthal jaw bone discovered in the cave called La Niche in the Coupe-Gorge in 1949 by **Raoul Cammas**.

Norbert Casteret, the renowned expert on the Pyrenees and speliologist, took part in the colouring of the Save on 8 April 1955 from its departure, not far from the tower in Larroque, to its resurgence to confirm that the waters of the

Save disappeared underground and reappeared at La Hilliere.

Georges Fouet, historian and archaeologist excavated the big Villa Lassalles at Montmaurin and the site of La Hilliere between 1946 and 1974. The writings of Abbé Couret tell us “ it seems that before the Revolution an enormous oak tree whose branches cast shade over a large area of the Spring and the cemetery had its trunk and branches literally carpeted in crutches and various exvotos which those who had experienced a miracle hung there.

Georges Fouet wrote in 1972 (in Gallia, pp83-126) “ the spring is a resurgence whose waters can only come from infiltrations of the Save further upstream, as was shown by the colouring experiment carried out at our request by M Norbert Casteret. It took 63 hours, after a difference in level of approximately 33 metres and a distance as the crow flies of 3 kms, for the coloured waters poured into the Save where it disappears at Larroque to reappear at La Hilliere”.

All the details of these ancient discoveries add to our knowledge of our area and its development, the sites as well as the discoveries themselves.

A number of contemporary archaeologists use as a basis of their research the methods and remains that have been discovered. Accordingly various laboratories and research centres are interested in the previous discoveries on sites that are potentially rich and are promising signs for Montmaurin/Lespugue.

Our catalogue of history is inexhaustible... it is a journey through time following the traces of human habitation in Montmaurin/Lespugue in successive eras with:

- Prehistory “ knowledge of the origins of man” from the early palaeolithic era,
- Gallo Roman, from the first to the fourth centuries,
- The medieval age shown by the presence of castle mottes and the remains of the Castet complex (XIII century),

all of which is complemented by the exceptional natural setting of the Comminges: the Save gorge, its flora and fauna, which are of interest to both holiday makers and walkers.



First excavation team in Montmaurin. On the left, L Méroc, Boulogne sur Gesse 1946 (R Simonet archives)

The National Monuments Centre's project for its sites is the answer to our desire to preserve them in perpetuity and to be included in the Culture and Tourism dynamic of the Comminges

RAISING THE PROFILE OF OUR HERITAGE...

All the sites and collections have to be maintained, restored and enhanced in order for them to be shown off to advantage. All the interventions for preservation and enhancement involve expense which the commune could never meet.

The National Monuments Centre and its President Philippe Belaval aim to further the local hold on Monuments which they manage with the support of local people and to link responsibilities so that it benefits local tourism and culture.

All this is what translates, in Montmaurin, into cooperation between the National Monuments Centre and regional and Departmental authorities by setting up the project proposed by M Christian Landes, chief curator of heritage and CMN administrator of the Montmaurin and Montcarré sites.

The future can be glimpsed in various ways via various groupings: educational activities amongst school pupils, responsibility for our environment, transmission of our heritage and knowledge to future generations... these are major stakes held in common between the CMN and the commune of Montmaurin.

We hope to see you at this presentation. Sincerely.

Silvia BELAIR, Françoise DARENGOSSE et Joséphine LOUGE

Réunion publique sur le projet de valorisation du patrimoine de Montmaurin et de son centre d'interprétation

Pascal MAILHOS
Préfet de la région Occitanie,
Préfet de la Haute-Garonne

Philippe BÉLAVAL
Président du Centre des Monuments Nationaux

en lien avec la mairie de Montmaurin,
vous convient à assister à une réunion publique

le mardi 3 octobre 2017 à 19h00
Salle des fêtes de Montmaurin

Pour la présentation, par le Centre des Monuments Nationaux,
de son projet de valorisation du Patrimoine archéologique de Montmaurin et de son centre d'interprétation, ainsi que
des projets de développement qui l'accompagnent.

En présence de représentants de la Direction régionale des affaires culturelles d'Occitanie, du conseil régional d'Occitanie, du conseil départemental de Haute-Garonne, de la communauté de communes Cœur et Coteaux du Comminges, du PETR du pays du Comminges.

(Un moment convivial clôturera cette réunion).



From L to R :
L'abbé Cathala, l'Abbé H. Breuil et L. Méroc
Montmaurin, september 1949
(R. Simonnet archives)



Georges Fouet, excavation of the Montmaurin Villa
(Archives départementales 31 – réf. 62-J-40)

General view of La Niche cave after being cleared
Back view L to R Robert Simonnet,
Marie-Antoinette and Henry de Lumley
Facing - Louis Méroc
(Mediterranean Prehistory review)



This newsletter is available in French and English. It is delivered in the village, available at the Mairie and also on line on the internet site www.montmaurin.fr

Drawing (page 1) Michel Biaugeaud - Gallo-Roman Villa at Montmaurin, drawing in Chinese ink.