



A guided tour through the village of Saint-Prex



The old village of Saint-Prex forms a point jutting out into the lake at the landing stage, which is used by the boats of the CGN (General Compagny of Navigation).



In the XIIIth century, in 1234 precisely, the Chapter of Lausanne Cathedral who owned this land decided to transfer the population living in Dracy to the peninsula. A large castle was built, as well as a public kiln and a mill, all surrounded by walls, parts of which can still be seen today, such as at the Clock Tower. A ditch was dug all round the peninsula which thus became an island connected to the mainland by a drawbridge during the day. Hinge marks of the bridge are still visible on the Clock Tower wall.



When passing through the town gate by the Clock Tower, have a look at the Mayor's House on your right. The Mayor represented the Chapter, ensuring order and the collection of taxes for Lausanne Cathedral.

On the clock pediment you can see two different mottos: on the northern side « Laissons dire et faisons bien » and on the southern side « Celui qui veille voit venir l'heure de son départ »; both are surrounded by the coat of arms of Saint-Prex, the fleur-de-lis.



The main street, called the Grand-Rue, leading from the Clock Tower to the lake, divides the village into two parts. There are rows of well-built houses, mostly with two storeys and private gardens at the back, as well as barns, stables, wine presses, etc.

The Old Forge, where the Tourist Office is now situated, and the workshop of the famous lithographer, Pietro Sarto, at Grand-Rue No. 15, are worth a visit. Some houses, such as Nos. 6, 8 and 10, were built in the XXth century by Italian migrant workers. A number of fountains can be admired in the village, as well as wrought iron signs representing a cock, a crown, bunches of grapes, ears of wheat, or Saint-Eloy, the patron saint of goldsmiths and blacksmiths.



On the right in the middle of the street stands the Foyer (Grand-Rue 11), a beautiful building which today houses a wedding room, a kindergarten, a games library and a meeting room.



The Forel Manor, at the top of the Quai du Suchet, dates back to XIIIth century. It belonged to a very famous family, whose members included a doctor and a psychiatrist. Both of them contributed greatly to the development and embellishment of the village.

The Castle, at the Northern entrance to the village, has a very imposing XIIIth century keep. Up to 1506 it was owned by the Chapter, which made it their summer residence. In 1536 the Bernese invaded the Canton of Vaud, imposing the Reformation and nationalising buildings and goods. At that time the Castle became a private estate and still is! For further information you can read the Castle's history on the plaque at the base of the keep wall.



The Quai du Suchet, whose name derives from the latin « suc » meaning hillock or mound, is at the southern tip of the island, situated about 45km. both from Villeneuve and from Geneva. From here have a look at the broad panorama which extends over 120 kilometres from the Moléson (2,006 m.) to the left to the Dôle mountain (1,610 m.) to the right, from the Prealps to the Swiss and then the French Alps with the Salève and the mountain chain called the Jura on the right.

The landing stage, where there are strong currents due to the local wind called «la bise», was built in 1884. First used in the conveyance of goods by water, it was soon abandoned in favour of rail transport, more expensive but much more rapid.



Another house worth a stop is Warnery-Dessaux House, also known as the Savoy House. Located at about 500 meters from the Castle, this building appears quite majestic with its sculptured wooden door in the shape of a tree and a crown, with a pediment at the top and flanked by two columns. On the second floor there are two large wooden balconies. It is certainly the most beautiful house in the street, Rue Saint-Prothais 17.



The Old School next to the Women's Beach was built in the XVIIIth century and was the first public school in the village. Renovated in 1994 by the Irène Leroy Foundation, the building is now used for social housing.



The beach next to the School was reserved for women only, as opposed to the one next to the Chauchy school, which was reserved for men: they date from the XIXth century. At that time workers used to come and wash half-naked in the lake at twilight and for this reason men and women had to be separate!



There are many interesting stories to be told and further information that could be given about the beautiful and original village of Saint-Prex, which is named after the saint Saint Prothais. A number of articles and other publications, photographs etc. have been consecrated to the medieval village of Saint-Prex, some about the village itself, the Catholic Church (built in 1920), the roman church (XIIIth century), the glass factory (1911) and its museum. Some of these can be consulted at the Tourist Office, located next to the Clock Tower. Many local products can also be found there, such as delicious wines, fruit, jams or cheeses, which make excellent and original gifts to take back home.



Thank you for your visit and we hope you enjoy our country!
Jean-Paul Zoëll. Lic. théol. Mars 2008