



Promenade dans la ville de Cahagnes



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Soyez les bienvenus à Cahagnes. Découvrez ce village du Bocage Normand situé à mi-chemin entre Caen et Vire et peuplé d'environ 1400 habitants. L'économie du village fut, pendant de nombreux siècles, tournée vers les activités agricoles (culture, élevage) et l'artisanat. La libération de la Normandie pendant l'été 1944 bouleversa à jamais la physionomie de la commune. Cahagnes fut reconstruite dans les années 1950 selon un nouveau plan d'urbanisme, grâce au courage des habitants et à la détermination des élus locaux. Ce circuit est l'occasion de découvrir son patrimoine de la Reconstruction.

Pour toute information relative aux lieux de visites, loisirs, marchés, hébergements et lieux de restauration dans le Pays de Vire | Collines de Normandie, rendez-vous à l'Office de Tourisme de Villers-Bocage, (horaires d'ouverture à consulter sur notre site internet).

Welcome to Cahagnes. Discover this village of the Bocage Normand located halfway between Caen and Vire and populated with approximately 1400 inhabitants. For many centuries, the village's economy was based on agricultural activities (cultivation, breeding) and crafts. The liberation of Normandy in the summer of 1944 changed the face of the village forever. Cahagnes was rebuilt in the 1950s according to a new urban plan, thanks to the courage of the inhabitants and the determination of the local councillors. This tour is an opportunity to discover its heritage of the Reconstruction.

For any information about places to visit, leisure, markets, accommodation and restaurants in the Pays de Vire | Normandy Hills, please visit Villers-Bocage's Tourist Office, (Opening hours to be consulted on our website).



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The historical context

The Second World War and the occupation - summer 1944

In Cahagnes, on 28 June 1944, the occupying troops placed 32 boxes of explosives and 6 small British bombs in the church. At about 9.30 p.m., the electrically controlled explosion caused the building to collapse.

Operation Bluecoat

During the Second World War, this attack was carried out by the British Second Army from 30 July to 7 August 1944, during the Battle of Normandy. The geographical objectives of this attack were to secure the Vire road and the heights of Mont Pinçon. Strategically, the attack was launched to allow American troops to exploit their breakthrough on the western flank from their coastal bridgehead.

The attack was launched from Caumont l'Éventé. Before the ground attack, the Allies carried out an aerial bombardment to neutralise the German positions. The village of Cahagnes, which was not in the objectives, was unfortunately devastated by a bombardment that lasted one hour.

The liberation of Cahagnes

On the evening of 31 July, Cahagnes was liberated by the 7th Hampshire after a hard day's fighting.

Following the bombing of 1944, Cahagnes was awarded a citation to the order of the regiment and the corresponding war cross by decision of 11 November 1948.

The history of the reconstruction of Cahagnes

The reconstruction of towns and villages throughout France was supervised by the State. The choice of town planners and architects fell to the Ministry of Reconstruction and Town Planning, created in November 1944 by the Provisional Government of the French Republic (GPRF). While waiting for permanent reconstruction, the inhabitants were housed in American barracks.

In 1945, the commune of Cahagnes was declared a disaster area by interministerial decree: it was required to have a town planning scheme for its reconstruction. The architect Claude Berson was commissioned to draw up the urban plan. His project was validated by the Prefect of Calvados on 20 January 1948, which allowed work to begin.

The development plan provides for two zones:

- A built-up area, i.e. the village
 - A rural zone composed mainly of farms.
- The built-up area is divided into two parts:
- A continuous building zone, composed of buildings aligned with the public road and intended for housing and commerce. Industrial establishments are forbidden in this zone.
 - A discontinuous construction zone composed of individual houses set back from the public road.

In 1949, the commune joined the «Association syndicale de reconstruction d'Aunay-sur-Odon», which includes several communes: Aunay-sur-Odon, Coulvain, Dampierre, Danvou-la-Ferrière, Jurques, Le-Plessis-Crimoult, Les Loges, Le-Mesnil-Auzouf, Saint-Geroges-d'Aunay and Saint-Pierre-du-Fresnes. Its main task was to draw up the reconstruction files, finalise the projects, award the contracts and supervise the work.

Several architects were appointed to work on different projects. Claude Berson, who designed the town planning scheme for Cahagnes, was responsible for the reconstruction of communal buildings: schools, the town hall and the cemetery.

War damage

Individuals, shopkeepers and the municipality had to fill in a damage file, then an expert architect came to estimate the amount of damage by calculating the amount of an identical reconstruction.

However, the constraints of town planning forced people to rebuild in a different way. In Cahagnes, no building was rebuilt identically. In 1959, the reconstruction of all properties was completed. The aim of the association syndicale was achieved and it was dissolved in March 1959. But in Cahagnes the reconstruction was not completely finished, the parish church remained, which was completed in 1966.

Architecture and materials

Cahagnes has a predominantly «traditional» architecture, with gable roofs and the use of slate and local stone. The reconstruction allowed the integration of modern architecture in the village, with the use of reinforced concrete and glass paving stones. Some of the buildings are hybrids, i.e. they have both traditional and modern elements.

See photos overleaf :

Traditional architecture = Town hall in Caen stone and slate roof

Modern architecture = Belfry in reinforced concrete

Hybrid architecture = Façade of a residential building in local stone rubble and cement frieze around the entrance door

Façade of the former town hall. The building is built in stone, the openings on the ground floor are decorated with a projecting frame in concrete = red gravel.

Traditional materials = Caen stone, Jurques red sandstone

Modern materials = Washed concrete, deactivated concrete - Both of these concretes are made of exposed aggregates (sand, gravel, pebbles, etc.). This coating is used for its decorative aspect.

«Nevada» glass tile - Glass brick is a modern architectural element widely used in post-war reconstruction. The paving stones are set in a cement grout, which fills the gaps between the stones. These glass bricks were invented in 1928 by the Saint Gobain company.

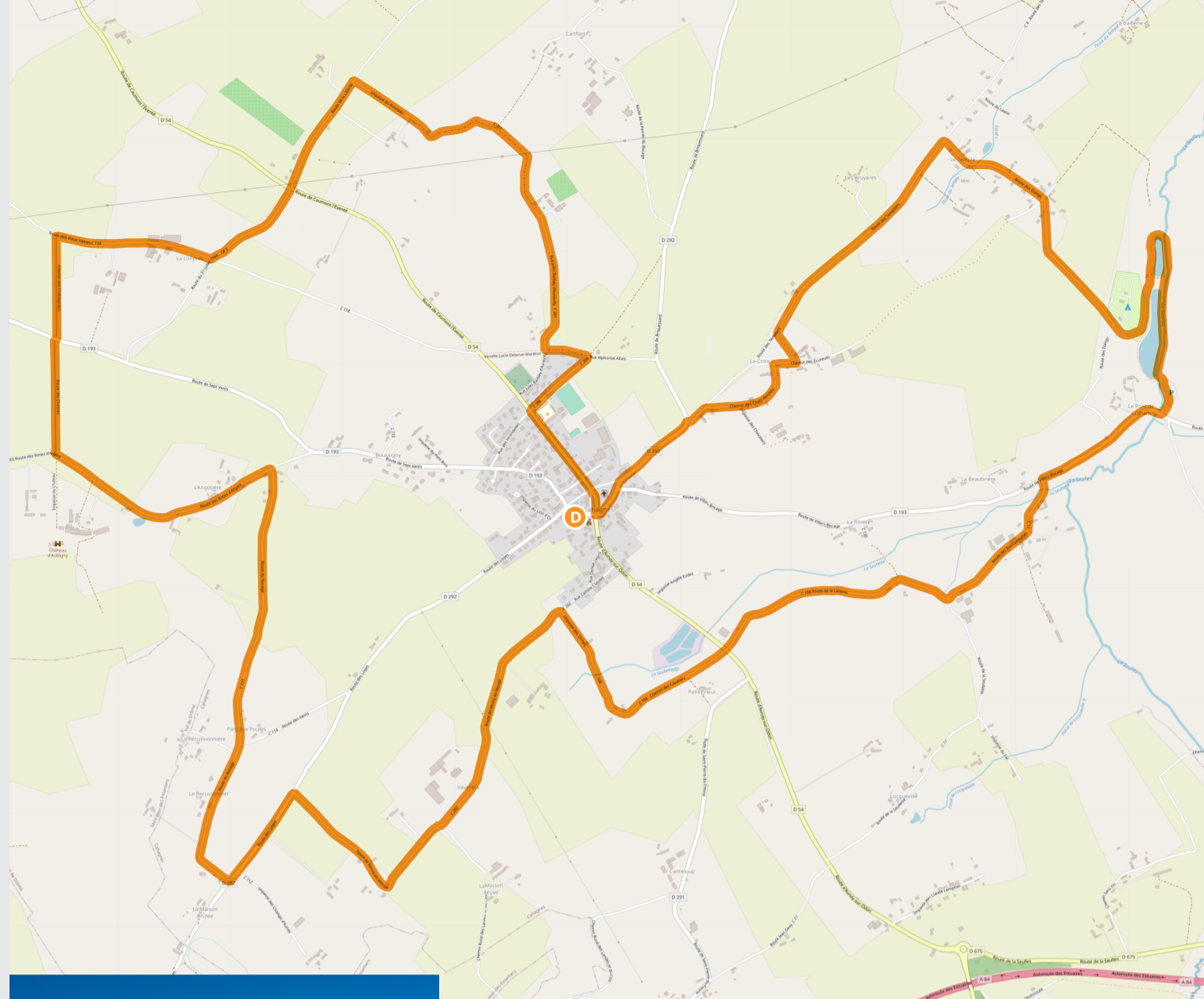
1- The Town Hall: The old town hall combined two functions: the town hall and the post office. It was located opposite the new one, on the road, at the level of the bus stop. It was partially demolished to improve traffic flow. The architects opted for a classical architecture with a single rectangular volume. As in Villers-Bocage, Condé-sur-Noireau and Aunay-sur-Odon, it is an administrative centre combining several functions: town hall and post office.

The proposed plan is as follows

- Ground floor: town council room, town hall and post office secretariats, sorting room, archives.
- 1st floor: accommodation for the town hall secretary and the PTT receiver.

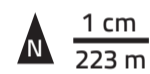
The building permit was submitted on 5 May 1954. The municipal council met for the first time in the council chamber on 8 March 1957.

The building was constructed from Caen stone by the Charles Legros company based in Cahagnes, who also built the school complex.



Randonnée de Cahagnes / Hike in Cahagnes
Parcours agrémenté de 14 panneaux d'interprétation
Route with 14 interpretation panels

Distance / Distance : 12 km
Durée / Duration : 4h



Téléchargez la fiche de cette randonnée en scannant ce code. / Download the information sheet for this walk by scanning this code.

2- The school: The boys' school located on this site, was destroyed during the fighting in 1944, as was the girls' school (now the village hall). After 18 months of work, the new school complex was inaugurated on 16 October 1955.

The new school complex consists of two symmetrical and similar buildings for 5 classes: a kindergarten class, 2 girls' classes and 2 boys' classes, as well as a large room for domestic education for the girls, a handicraft class for the boys and a canteen.

The walls are built of Caen stone and the partitions of concrete blocks. Each courtyard is lit by glass slabs.

The reception building consists of two semi-detached houses for the school teachers, the facades are identical and symmetrical. Each house has its own entrance and two flats (one on the ground floor and one on the first floor).

3- The cemetery: In April 1951, the town council requested a modification to the town planning scheme concerning the cemetery. Initially planned for the exit of the village, about 200 metres from the current multi-purpose hall, the elected representatives wished to move it to the exit of the village, on the edge of the departmental road 54, towards Caumont-l'Éventé. It is built on a plot of land of about one hectare, sold amicably.

The SACER company (Société anonyme pour la construction et l'entretien des routes - Public limited company for road construction and maintenance) was responsible for its construction. The cemetery was opened in June 1956.

4- The presbytery: This is the former presbytery of Cahagnes, built at the beginning of the 19th century, where the parish priest lived until the middle of the 20th century. After 1944, the presbytery kept its vocation of housing the priests and welcoming the young people of Cahagnes for catechism classes.

In 1983, the presbytery was transformed into a reception centre for school children. Now it is a group lodging managed by the commune. The building was damaged during the bombing and has been restored, retaining its original architecture.

5- The bells: New bells were cast in Villedieu-les-Poêles by the Cornille Havard company, partly with the 817 kg of bronze recovered from the debris of the old ones. They were baptized and installed in 1951 in the temporary church, during a great ceremony in the presence of the bishop of the time, Monseigneur Picaut. The bells installed in the bell tower of the new church were too noisy and were the subject of complaints from 1967 onwards. Between 1971 and 1975, they were taken down and installed in the presbytery grounds, a few dozen metres from the church.

6- The church: In 1946, a Romney shed, which all the inhabitants called «the barrel», was installed as a temporary church. On 25 March 1951, the bells were installed in the belfry. This temporary church was used until 1966, i.e. for 20 years. It marked a whole generation.

On 12 April 1949, the commune joined the Cooperative for the Reconstruction of the Churches of Calvados. Canon Lecoa, director of the cooperative, wanted to bring an internationally renowned architect to Calvados, and so he called on the Swiss architect Hermann Baur.

Hermann Baur was renowned for building modern churches in the avant-garde style. First of all, Hermann Baur proposed an ambitious project. He

will always have difficulties in meeting the amount of war damage. Several reductions, such as the height of the walls, or abandonments, such as the gallery or the organ, would have to be made in order to respect the budget.

Moreover, the bold architecture proposed was not unanimously approved. In the end, the prefect had the last word and approved the project in February 1962.

The first stone was laid on 21 October 1962. The church was consecrated on 18 September 1966.

The Church of the Nativity of Our Lady has a free-standing belfry made of very slender compacted and vibrated concrete, similar to that of the Church of All Saints in Basel (Switzerland), also designed by Hermann Baur. This choice offers a striking contrast to the very horizontal church.

Baur opted for a fan-shaped «amphitheatre» plan. It is a single space without vertical support (pillars) that narrows towards the choir. The floor descends towards the choir at the same time as the ceiling rises. It is grandeur and simplicity that dominate. The architect has removed the vertical supports to give this impression of lightness. The church is part of a «pre-conciliar» movement that favours more open spaces, avoiding the usual divisions (nave, transept, choir). This movement was influenced by the architecture of early Christian churches of the basilica type, which allowed the faithful to see the altar and the priest properly.

The building is made of concrete, the outer walls are covered with rubble. It is covered with a metal framework.

The stained glass windows: The side walls are blind, the nave is lit by four large vertical openings on the façade. The stained glass windows were designed by François Chapuis, originally from Nancy, and made by the Gouffault workshop, founded by Louis Gouffault in 1930 in the centre of Orléans.



Les vitraux de l'église



Le chœur

