

LA BOUILLE BOAT

EXHIBITION may 1th – september 30th 2013



Why is the tiny village of La Bouille shown on the old maps of France?

Because of the La Bouille boat!

From the 16th century people travelling from the West boarded the boat on their way to Rouen, and

in the 19th century numbers of passengers soared.

Testimonies of passengers travelling to Rouen abounded in literature, paintings, postcards and tourist guides.

Historical background

1560 – Barges were pulled by horses along the tow path, and were also rigged with sails.

They were regularly attacked by highwaymen, and had to defend themselves with weapons: the fare went up!

The La Bouille boat had an enclosed shelter and carried up to 200 passengers, plus goods and animals...

1830 – The age of steam. The look of the boat changes: the hull is propelled by 2 paddle-wheels, just like the Mississippi steamers.

1900 – 150 000 passengers per year, sometimes up to 4000 on bank holidays!

1974 – The line is permanently closed after operating for a while only at week-ends and in summer time.

The route

In the 16th century, the route was as follows: In Rouen, the boat was anchored in the middle of the river. Passengers went ashore on small covered boats which looked like gondolas.

1830 – Disembarkation quays are built, all on the right bank. Passengers from the left bank use the ferry.

Literature

There is a rich profusion of literary works devoted to the La Bouille boat.

3 plays (among which one dating back to 1690!) The recurring themes are boat delays and romantic affairs taking place on the journey.

A short satirical story (1752) relates the adventures of a passenger who dreamt of going as far as the « famous town of La Bouille » !

Many tourist guides provide information on towns and villages which the boat passes through.

In the 19th century, several well-known writers mentioned the famous boat:

- Maupassant : described the boat passing by in front of Flaubert's house in Croisset
- Flaubert : made fun of the passengers clothes.
- Octave Mirbeau : "La Bouille gives tourists the illusion of the sea-side"
- Malot : evokes the touristic aspects of the village
- Maurice Leblanc : describes lovers eloping on the boat.
- Jean de la Varende : "La Bouille is the Tomb of virtues"

Poems

- Albert Lambert : « *From La Bouille to Rouen by boat* »
- Hugo : « *La Seine forms a superb crescent* »
- Robert Delamare : « *We were at least 300 on the little ship...* »

Paintings

Albert Lebourg, an impressionist painter, leading figure of the Rouen School, devoted to the village nearly a hundred oil paintings. Systematically on the foreground he includes a moving object : the ferryman's boat, the ferry, or most often, the little ship with its circling smoke.

Pissarro gives a vivid picture of the little ship when visiting Rouen .

All the painters of the Rouen School have also included this picturesque element in their paintings : Pinchon, Guilbert, Vignet

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgYT415pCv8>

Agnes Thomas, (traduction Christiane Cornisch)

