



## **Les Forges des Salles**

The site was created in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by the Rohan dynasty, they used the iron to make weapons and canon balls.

The canteen and the foreman's house are 19<sup>th</sup> century but most of the buildings date from the 18<sup>th</sup> century such as the 'rangé' - this is the row of blacksmiths cottages and the forge manager's house.

### ***Why this particular site in central Brittany?***

There was no transport system at the time so any site needed three elements: first a forest for charcoal to be used as heating fuel, second a water source for hydro power and third a supply of iron. All of these are to be found in the Quenecan Forest and its surroundings.

Different tradesmen were to be found in different places. In the forest you would find packers, carters, charcoal burners, wood cutters and the miners. In the village were the blacksmiths who worked at the furnace with the molten metal. There were also the children who, from ten years old, worked with their parents to learn their trade. Then there were the foundry workers or casters. The first of these came from Normandy - they earned a great deal of money for their skills and hard work because the Bretons were no longer conversant with the process of smelting iron. The third set of the members of the village were the joiners and carpenters. Then there was an area for the foreman who supervised each division of the workforce and the managers who were not necessarily the actual owner.

### ***Was there a school for the children?***

The school was set up in 1802 as a non-denominational establishment and then it was run by nuns from Saint-Brieuc. This lasted until 1961 and then it returned to its 'Laïque' status until the school finally closed in 1968.

This was the only forge to have a school which was free but the new owners the de Janzé had created a successful working society with a complete and exceptional social support structure. Therefore the blacksmiths preferred to change their trades and work as village woodcutters rather than return to the insecure industrial hardship of the north or east.

### ***How many people lived there?***

At this time there was twenty to forty blacksmiths, a hundred and fifty to two

hundred villagers, and as many again living in the forest - so about four hundred people in all.

In the forest were the miners, the woodcutters, packers, cart-loaders, muleteers and mule-loaders because everyone had a set task. No-one did everything, all the work was divided up and shared.

### ***How was the metal exported?***

Iron was either exported to Brest to make canons and canon balls in times of war or it was made into cooking pots, crepe griddles, anvils, nails, farming equipment and then everything was then sold in the local markets.

### ***When did smelting stop?***

In 1977 the making of iron ceased with the arrival of coal. The charcoal furnaces couldn't compete with new coal furnaces which now gave enough carbon emission and heat to produce steel. Added to this imported ore contained a higher percentage of iron.

