

Joch : the heart of the Barony

The name of Joch probably comes from the Indo- European root « juk » meaning high steep place.

The village is really « perched » on a rocky promontory overlooking the plain. Its average altitude is 370 m.

Water, the true asset of Joch

No river flows across Joch, and yet there is water everywhere !

In 1282 the lords of Joch, Gueralda d'Urg and Arnau de Cortsavi allowed their vassals to catch the waters of the river Lentilla and to dig an irrigation canal. It was called the « rec major » (the main stream). It is almost 9 km long and has irrigated the plain for centuries. That is why there are fountains, drinking troughs all along the « carrer major » (main street) and an old washhouse just before getting to the mills.

Francesc Catala, one of the general practitioners in Vinça, was also a poet. He had been born in Joch in 1929. In one of his poems he celebrated « l'aigua » (the water singing night and day...)

The land

Grain and vine growing were the main sources of income for centuries in Joch. Until the 19th century the wealthiest families also owned large flocks of sheep and a few cows. Then, after the end of the second world war, fruit trees started being planted. For decades, and especially during the sixties, Joch was thriving thanks to the production of peaches. In spring the plain would turn a magnificent pink with the blooming peach trees!

The Barony

At the beginning the Barony only included the villages of Joch, Finestret and Sahorla, but everything changed from the 15th century onward with the arrival of the Perapertusas family in the castle. This crossborderer noble family was one of the most powerful and influential in «Conflent» in the 1550s. It then included Joch, Finestret, Sahorla, Glorianes, Rodes, then spread into the Kingdom of France as far as Rabouillet in Fenolledes (north of Joch). As the Perapertusas remained the lords of Joch for more than three centuries, the village has kept their armorial bearings as coat of arms for Joch: three diamonds on a golden shield.

The church

The old Roman church of Joch is mentioned as early as 1031. It was located to the north of the present graveyard. In the 1750s, as it turned out to be decayed, too small and far away from the village, the building of a new church was planned.

According to what Joseph Guillot,(who was the parish priest at that time) wrote, the foundation stone was laid on May 5th 1756 by the procurator of the Countess of Aranda, Vicountess of Joch, who had made a donation to help with the building of the new church. It took about twenty years to build, using the stones from the old church. There is a date engraved in the granite portal: March 2nd 1776 and another one on the keystone of the gallery: 1778.

The Baroque art in Joch

The architecture of the church is simple : one nave and three side chapels. But it contains remarkable altarpieces, real jewels of the Baroque art in Roussillon !

First the one dedicated to Saint Martin, in the high altar, is dated from 1728 then the one dedicated to Saint John the baptist from 1698 . They both came from the old church and were very probably made by the sculptor Joseph Sunyer who made many other altar pieces in Conflent, among them the one in the church dedicated to Saint Peter in Prades.

The other two altar pieces of this church used to belong to the convent of the Dominicans in Perpignan and arrived in Joch during the French Revolution.

There is the one dedicated to Saint Hyacinth, which was made in 1594 by Honoré Rigaud, the great grand father of Louis XIVth's famous portraitist (Hyacinth Rigaud)

And there is also the one dedicated to Saint Cecil and Saint Agnes made in 1623 by Jean Antoine Marti.

At the foot of the bell tower there is a boundary stone indicating the limit of the concession for the old gold mine of Glorianes. (a nearby village which was included in the Barony)

To the south : « el veïnat » (the neighbourhood)

As time went by, many openings were made in the walls (which had been built between 1361 and 1368) so as to let some light into the houses inside the fortified castle. However, to the south, in « el veïnat » (the neighbourhood)) parts of the walls are still quite untouched.

There were four slopes cut into the stones which led to the fortified castle. The northern, eastern and western entrances are still here.

The road to La Bastide, a link between France and Spain

The southern entrance to Joch can still be seen but is now blocked up.

It opened to the road leading to La Bastide, in the Vallespir (the River Tech valley, parallel to the River Têt valley where Joch is located.)

That road used to be a major commercial road between the Kingdom of Spain and the Kingdom of France because Joch was only a few miles away from France. Everything changed after the treaty of the Pyrenees was signed (when Louis XIV married Mary Teresa of Spain in the 17th century) and Roussillon was included in the Kingdom of France.

At the foot of the walls there is a stone bridge across the torrent called « del's abeuradors » (the drinking troughs), and below there is a spring which used to be one of the main water supplies of the village. Once the bridge has been crossed the road leading to La Bastide climbs up the « Puig de las feixes » (the mount of the terraced hillsides) Its highest point is 956 m, the highest point of the Barony.

The jails

The lords of Joch had the right to establish justice on anyone accused of misdemeanour on their lands. In the 17th century the jails were located upstairs in the castle. There were three locked doors to walk through before getting there. But some prisoners managed to escape through the windows, with ladders and ropes to climb down the walls, as was related in April 1616 by Raphaël Molins, who was the Lord Mayor of Joch then.

El Castell (The Castle)

As it was built on a rocky promontory overlooking the plain and the Roman road leading from Roussillon to the Cerdagne, the Castle of Joch may have been a major military governing place as early as the Roman empire. In the 10th century it was headquarters to the viscounty of Conflent.

The castle of the Perapertusas, barons then viscounts of Joch

In 1459 Bernard de Perapertusa inherited the possessions from his aunt Eleanor de Perellos, baroness of Joch, so he settled in the castle. His descendants made it their home improving it as years went by.

It was a square building with four turrets at each angle.

To reach it, there was a bridge over a ditch, then a tunnel under some of the castle rooms.

In the middle of the inner courtyard , a cistern dug into the schist was used to collect rainwater. The viscounts just had to walk across a lane to go to their chapel dedicated to Saint Peter and Saint Paul.

In 1656 shortly before the treaty of the Pyrenees was signed , the Perapertusas left Joch for good and settled in Spain. As a consequence their castle fell into ruins, which became quite popular with the Romantics in the 19th century...in 1842, one of them recommended the visit of the « very picturesque ruins»of the castle . The castle, its outbuildings and the chapel were sold in the 19th century. Now, some parts of the castle have been renovated and turned into private houses. The bridge over the ditch is still there, as well as the tunnel, the cistern and the chapel...

El salt (The waterfalls)

After flowing for almost 9 km from the river Lentilla, the irrigation canal reaches Joch then the plain. There are three successive waterfalls. After the second one the canal splits into three branches: the first one leads the water to Finestret, the second one to Rigarda and the third one to Sahorla and Vinça.

Els molis (the watermills)

A document signed in 1282 by the lords of Joch, proves that they allowed their vassals to build an irrigation canal but they ordered them to build two watermills before giving them the right to catch water for irrigation.

The first watermills were built upstream. In 1302 about sixty heads of families declared that they had to grind their grain there. But those watermills were soon abandoned as the canal was continued to the village itself. As early as the turn of the 15th century the water of the canal activated the new mills down the castle: two flour mills belonging to the lord and one oil mill belonging to the Molins family. Jean Eyt, one of the older inhabitants of Joch, remembered that the mills often worked night and day ! They were in use until the turn of the 20th century.

The paper mill

The water falls also operated a paper mill which opened in 1860. Paper was made with old hemp and linen materials. After fermenting in tubs, they were ground by big mallets operated by the waterwheel.

Then the mixture was strained in order to make sheets of paper. The paper mill closed down at the turn of the 20th century.

La rectoria (the rectory)

This stately building underwent some changes as time went by but two loopholes in perfect condition can still be seen in its lower part. It was very probably the fortress belonging to the Order of the Temple as is mentioned in an act dating from 1182 . It was indeed on the road to Finestret and near the castle. From the 15th to the end of the 17th century the Salvetat family and their descendants lived there. Then they bequeathed it to the church. It became the rectory. The painted ceiling of the parish priest's bedroom was painted at that time.

François Molins

Born in 1750, he was the parish priest in Joch when the French Revolution broke out. He was an educated and broad- minded man, so he took oath of allegiance to the Constitution in 1792 then became Mayor of Joch in 1799. Until 1805 he was both Mayor and parish priest. He then had to make a choice so he gave up being a priest and remained mayor until 1816. When the clergy's possessions were sold, he bought the rectory and lived there.

He wrote about the « hateful rights of the old regime which drove the people to make a revolution fortunately leading to freedom. »

Possessions of the city of Joch (la commune)

In the 1840s, the « commune » was obliged to find a new rectory, so in 1843 the Molins family sold the old rectory (that François had bought to make it his home) and it became the new rectory.

But in 1905 when the new law made it compulsory to separate the possessions of the church from the possessions of the state, the parish priest had to leave the rectory .

As it was owned by the « commune », it was first rented then sold before being bought again by the « commune » in the 90s

Now it has become the current town hall!

The parish priest's bedroom with its painted ceiling is located next to the « secrétaire de mairie »'s office.

La Fortsa (the fortified castle) a lordly cellar

Between 1361 and 1368 Ramon de Perellos, the lord of Joch, had the fortified castle built to defend the population from the mercenaries who had been dismissed by the King of France after the peace of Bretigny in 1360. Indeed there were frequent raids from those mercenaries who plundered the villages of Conflent which were not fortified.

The houses around the castle were surrounded by the fortifications. The fortified castle offered shelter to all the people living in Joch and the barony. Some lived there, some others owned a cellar where they stored their harvest. In 1466 a man called Bernat Pujol owned two houses in the fortified castle : he lived in one of them and used the other as a cellar. Several inhabitants of the Barony had cellars in the fortified castle. A rich heiress from Finestret called Margarida Sabiuda, even had three !

As time went by, the village spread to the west along the irrigation canal with most houses next to the rectory and the washhouse. However many people stayed to live in the fortified castle until the fifties.

Now, most of those older people have died, and some of their houses have been bought by people coming from various parts of France, and Europe and the whole world...They have done their best to renovate and make the « Fortsa » great again !...