



Commune de
Bergholtz

Castles and early church (panel 4)

Who was the Lord of Bergholtz? The village was first mentioned in 680 in a document belonging to Ebermunster Abbey. The abbey owned property donated by Sainte-Odile. In 727, the village was included in the first donation made by Eberhard, Count of Alsace, to Murbach Abbey. The abbot of Murbach became the lord of the village!

The abbots granted permission for the construction of two fortified castles, sentinels to watch over and

protect the town and control access to their seigneurie.

The first, called the "Wamschurturm", was built in the 12th century by the nobles of Bergholtz, vassals of Murbach Abbey. By the middle of the 15th century, the Bergholtz family appears to have died out. The abbey then gave the castle in fief to Conrad de Hungerstein. In 1690, it was finally sold to Paul Simon, bailiff of Bergholtz.

In 1550, the abbey's terrier, i.e. its register of laws and customs, states that the castle is made up of the following elements: "house, tower, door and forecourt. It is therefore similar to the castral model of the 12th century with a central keep surrounded by a small circular enclosure with a forecourt. A similar castle was located in Issenheim.

In 1762, the historian Sigismond Billing added that this "old castle is built entirely of ashlar", or cut stone blocks. In the 18th century, all that remained was a square tower, which was destroyed during the French Revolution. At the eastern end of the village, you can still see the ancient castral motte (a defensive mound)...

On the north side of the motte is the old medieval cemetery, enclosed by a surrounding wall. In 1901, eleven 11th-century sarcophagi were discovered here. They are all carved in pink sandstone, probably from the Bergholtz quarry. The site of the early Bergholtz church is also near the cemetery. It was replaced by the church of St. Gall in about 1760.

A second fortified site, known as the "Stotzenturm", can be found on the outskirts of the village. Unfortunately, its exact location is unknown. It bears the name of the Stotzheim family, who occupied it until the second half of the 14th century. It then passed into the hands of the Schultheiss family. When the family died out in around 1430, the property reverted to the Haus family and was used as a presbytery.

Winegrower's house (panel 6)

Bergholtz's wine-growing economy flourished from the Middle Ages onwards. The good reputation of its wines and terroirs enabled the winegrowers to grow rich despite the taxes imposed by the Prince-Abbot of Murbach.

From the 16th century onwards, the winegrowers' prosperity was reflected in their beautiful Renaissance mansions. The local pink sandstone quarries made it possible to build large stone houses like the one at no. 2 Rue de Bergholtz-Zell. Dated 1540, it was probably the home of the provost, an official of Murbach Abbey. Ashlar is used to great effect around the openings and in the quoins.

You won't find any half-timbered houses in Bergholtz - the winegrowers were rich enough to invest in stone! Half-timbering is limited to certain outbuildings and gables, such as at the farmhouse at 10 Rue de l'Eglise.

Take a stroll along Rue de l'Eglise and Rue de Bergholtz-Zell to view these winegrowers' houses. How can you recognise them? Despite changes in the urban fabric over the centuries, some farms have retained their pedestrian and carriage gates. The carriage gates were built in a semicircular arch shape. This allows carriages and carts to enter the courtyard. The outbuildings, cellar and main residence were arranged around this central courtyard.

These gates were sometimes decorated with a date or the owner's initials. Number 19 in the Rue de Bergholtz-Zell, for example, still has a fine semi-circular gateway topped with the date 1597. This winegrower's house was used as a tithe cellar by the Prince-Abbots of Murbach. They used it to collect taxes on the grape harvest and wine production.

Agricultural economics and the Meyer plough (panel 7)

In the Middle Ages, the inhabitants of Bergholtz practiced mixed farming. They grew

- cereals such as barley, wheat, rye and oats,
- along with the hemp and flax needed for clothing,
- and cabbage, turnips, broad beans and lentils.

However, wine production was already the main activity at this time. The winemaking processes were basic. It was difficult to mature vintages successfully and consistently.

However, Murbach Abbey was already concerned about the quality and reputation of the wines being produced. The abbey collected taxes on vineyard production!

The abbot also appointed winegrowers to two important positions, thereby ensuring a certain quality control:

- gourmets: they were the wine tasters. They also acted as intermediaries between buyers and sellers.
- and the chargeurs de vin, or wine loaders, who filled the barrels ready for shipment.

The omnipresence of wine production right up to the present day has given the villagers the nickname "Rabstacke", the vine stock!

The farm at 10 Rue de l'Eglise is typical of this type of mixed farming. The presence of a barn stable and cellars suggest that the family worked as ploughmen and winegrowers. In the 1800s, with the advent of industrialisation, farming families also started weaving at home for manufacturers in Guebwiller. It was a great way to earn a little extra!

On the corner of Rue de l'Eglise and Rue de Bergholtz-Zell, a second property attracts visitors' attention: that of the blacksmith Louis Meyer from Bergholtz. The second half of the 19th century was marked by the quest for profitability and improved quality. As such, mechanization was increasing. Louis Meyer created a plough system for fields and vines. It was patented in 1860 and 1863!

Vineyards and their evolution (panel 10)

Today, the vineyards are located on the sunny slopes of the Oberlinger.

When the first monks settled in Bergholtz, and then in Bergholtz-Zell, they will have found established settlements and vineyards. A donation from Count Eberhard to the Abbey of Murbach, in around 735-737, refers to vines in Orschwih.

Germanic mythology attributes the appearance of the vine to the god Odin, but in fact it was the Murbach Abbey that encouraged its development. Throughout the Middle Ages, Alsatian wines enjoyed a fine reputation. Thanks to the transport and communication links provided by the Rhine and Ill rivers, wines were exported to Switzerland, Germany, Italy, England and the Netherlands.

Despite the control exercised by Murbach Abbey, the vineyards continued to expand until the French Revolution. In the 17th century, the vineyards extended as far as the Schwarzberglen, towards the upper reaches of the foothills. Old retaining walls are still visible in the forest... It wasn't until the 19th century that the surface area of the vineyards gradually diminished and they were increasingly concentrated in the highest quality plots.

The wine-growing economy suffered on several occasions with wars, and was also weakened by the vine's enemies: diseases and insects. White grubs and spiders were reported as early as 1246. At the beginning of the 20th century, winegrowers also had to contend with a new enemy from America: phylloxera. The vineyards had to be completely redeveloped as a consequence! Diseases such as powdery mildew and downy mildew also attack vines. In a manuscript from the early 14th century, there are already two references to "miltaw".

These disasters and the quest for quality forced winegrowers to change their practices: carefully selecting plots and grape varieties, experimenting and looking for new ways to combat them. Guilds, agricultural committees and then winegrowers' associations acted as veritable think tanks.

Grand Cru Spiegel (panel 11)

The wines produced in the commune of Bergholtz and their terroir have enjoyed a great reputation since the Middle Ages. A document from 1543 refers to vineyards at Strälacker, and another from 1606 mentions vineyards at Niederhohenröd and Wohlhauser Matten. The "Schwarzberg, Weid, Egten and Stein" vintages were also held in high regard.

This quest for quality was supported by the Prince-Abbots of Murbach. They had a financial interest in it because they levied taxes on wine production. This positive image also helped to boost the image of the Principality of Murbach and to increase prices on the wine market.

The localities of *Schwartzberg*, *Hohenrod* and *Stein* are referred to in documents from the 15th century onwards. They took the name *Spiegel* from 1830 onwards. Spiegel's reputation grew from the 1950s onwards thanks to the winegrowers' quest for quality. It was classified as a *Grand Cru* in 1983.

Located between Guebwiller and Bergholtz, *Spiegel* is a south-east facing terroir on gentle slopes, at an altitude ranging from 260 to 315 metres. Of the 15,000 ha of vineyards in Alsace, 850 ha are classified as Grand Cru. The Spiegel covers an area of 18.26 hectares.

Spiegel is German for mirror, a reminder of its ability to capture light and redistribute it to the grapes so that they ripen properly. If you are lucky enough to take a walk there on a fine day, you can feel the difference in warmth between the village and these well-exposed slopes.

Its sandy clay terroir is ideal for growing vines. All four Alsatian grape varieties are grown here:

- a **Pinot Gris** with fine aromas, a rounded, sweet mouth feel. It can be aged in a cellar;
- a rather dry and powerful **Gewurztraminer**, fine and smooth with spicy and floral aromas;
- a racy **Riesling** with a lingering taste on the palate;
- a **Muscat** with subtle aromas of white flowers and herbal tea.

Annual sales in this terroir average **35,000 bottles**.

Quarry and Vauban canal (panel 12)

The village of Bergholtz has a wealth of natural resources that have been developed and used since the Middle Ages. The surrounding foothills are covered with vineyards and the summit with forests and stone quarries! The famous pink sandstone!

The two quarries at Bergholtz are around 625 meters long and 10 to 20 meters high.

The *Schwartzberg* quarry appears to have been in use since the 11th century. Murbach Abbey granted the Munch family from Basel permission to use it. They built the Château de *Stettenberg* in Orschwihr, in particular.

Stone was quarried in the 16th century to build winegrowers' houses in the village. Its use intensified in the 1700s with commissions from religious institutions. Sandstone was used to build new Baroque buildings such as the church in Bergholtz. It was also used in large-scale projects overseen by Murbach Abbey, such as the Guebwiller canonical quarter, comprising houses and the church of Notre-Dame.

Stonemasons worked in-situ in the quarries. They then had to lower the sandstone blocks down using *schlitt*. These resembled large wooden sleighs... dangerous, heavy convoys....

In 1820, a second pink sandstone quarry was opened at *Hitschet*, in the forest. The *Schwartzberg* and *Hitschet* quarries were in operation until at least 1870. They were successively leased by quarrymen, tile-makers and stonemasons from Bergholtz and Guebwiller. The intensity of building work was so great in the 19th century that requests were submitted to open new quarries. These requests were refused by the commune in order to preserve the communal forest: another of the village's assets! At the end of the 19th century, quarrying declined and came to an end with the gradual introduction of cheaper materials.

The Bergholtz and Buhl quarries were also involved in a royal project! Quite an achievement! Following the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697, Louis XIV ordered Vauban to build the stronghold of Neuf-Brisach. The aim of the stronghold was to defend the new borders of the Kingdom of France. To supply the site, the engineer Jean-Baptiste de Règemorte ordered the creation of a canal. The raw materials, wood and stone, were transported via the Vauban canal. This canal links Neuf-Brisach to Rouffach and then splits into two branches towards Pfaffenheim and Bergholtz.

Following the flood of 1740, the canal was filled in in 1790. Today, all that remains is a ditch running alongside Rue Vauban.