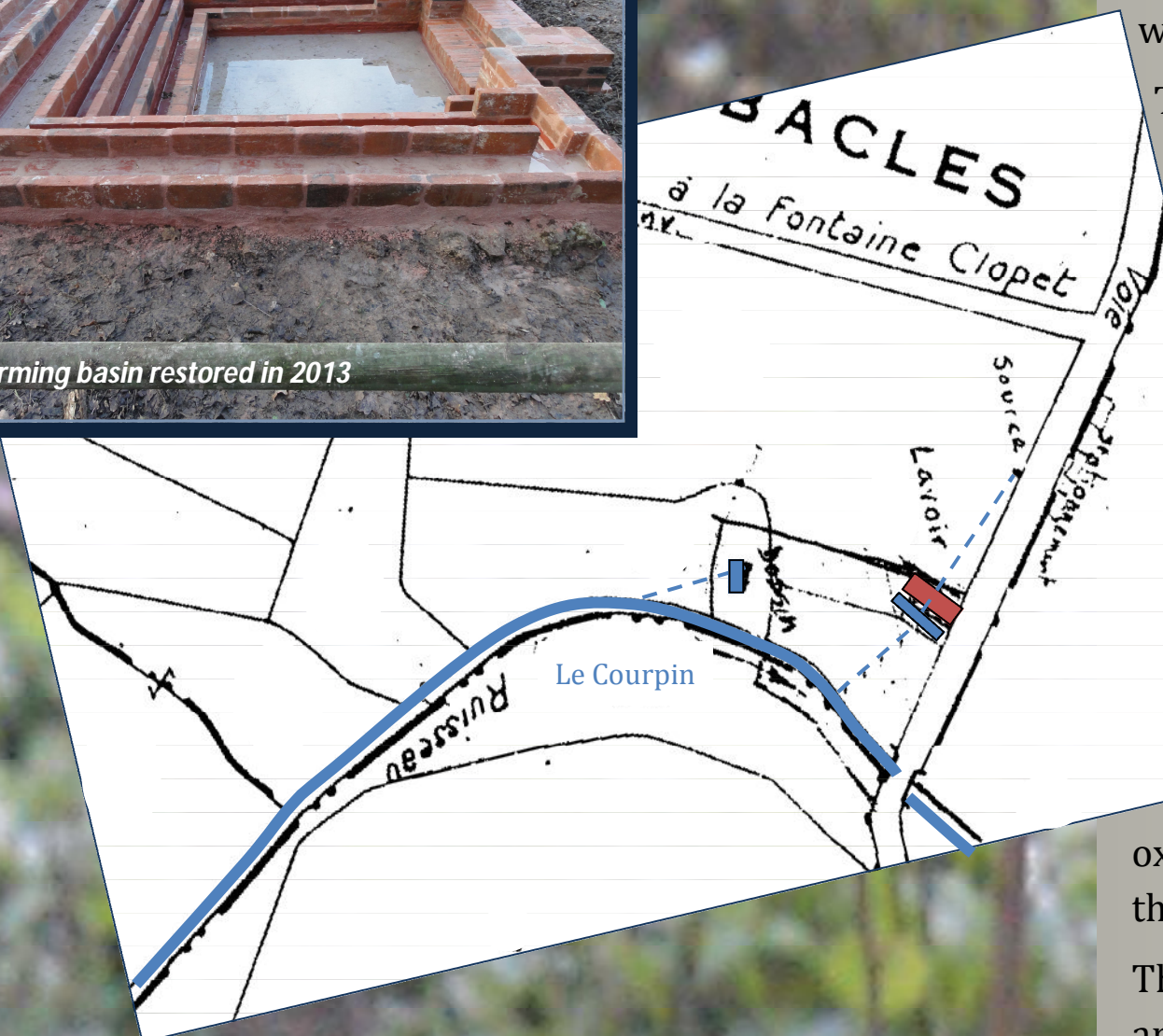


THE WASHHOUSE *and the fish farming basin*

COMMUNAL HERITAGE



Fish farming basin restored in 2013



On the northern bank of the Courpin creek, two springs spurting out from the limestone plate beneath were channeled to power the washhouse. The first one, called "Pont aux Bâcles" along the way, and the second, 50 meters further in the western part of the field.

The washhouse, unique with its 5 independent basins, was built around 1875 as a result of major epidemics of cholera from 1830 to 1850, and the Act of 1851 which required the municipality to create one to get a better hygiene domestic. This mecca of meetings and exchanges reserved for the fairer sex of Cheverny, was gradually emptied of this memorable event in the years 1950-1960, with the advent of washing machines.

After half a century of neglect, restoration works were undertaken. A fish farming basin was discovered and excavated with the help of archaeologists.

The source that fed the washhouse, was the one which had been captured and diverted in 1880 during the construction to fill them. Bleachers built on three sides were lined (cf. photo) with short low walls which formed a small canal. The water flew through it, oxygenated by following down the steps one by one, then run to the Courpin river, through a hole drilled in the bottom of the basin.

This small communal heritage, now fully restored, is brightened up with a picnic area, and will be in the near future, the starting point of a walk along the creek which explores " Courpin and its sources".



THE WASHING, FORMERLY CALLED "THE STEAM"

In our region, "the steam" was performed 2 or 3 times a year for all linens and clothing.

At home, we dipped or "exchanged" clothes in warm soapy water to remove the most important dirt. In a tub which had a plug, we put the linen protected from the bottom by bundles of sticks, and wrapped in a big linen, where we put ashes of brambles or bundle with sometimes a bag of bay leaves to flavor.

In a cast-iron cauldron where the water was boiling, we took the water with a container fitted with a long handle to pour it into the tub. This instrument is called "The steam", which gave its name to the whole process.

The water came through the linen and ashes, and was collected at the bottom by a pipe to be heated, and again poured onto the linen.

The washhouse has 2 fireplaces where the machine could be boiled on-site boilers (photo above : reconstitution process in 2004).

THE ROLE OF WASHERWOMEN

For decades the washhouse was a place of hard work for the women who came to rub and rinse their own linen or that they had been entrusted with.

The washerwomen brought "the steam" on a wheelbarrow and often over a long distance .

Upon arrival, a quarryman, neighbour of the washhouse and keeper of the key, gave them a place for the day against 5 pennies of the time.

In Cheverny, the washerwomen mainly used « washing saddle » to scrub the linen standing up (very rarely a washboard), with a scrubbing brush and soap.

The rinsing was done in the washhouse basin with a beetle or in twisting it until there was no more traces of detergent. For the last dip, bleach was added, and sometimes, blue balls (crushed lapis lazuli), to brighten up the white.

The drying was done near the washhouse or back at home on meadows, hedges or bushes, or more posteriorly on a wire stretched between two trees. The linen was ironed and stored in large wardrobe.

