

# The History of the Sainte-Croix Fair

## The Sainte-Croix Fair throughout the centuries

### Nearly 1,000 years of tradition...

*The beginning of the Sainte-Croix Fair in Lessay, the precise history of which is lost in the mists of time, probably coincided with the signing of the Charter which founded the Abbey in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.*

*It is indeed highly probable that the fair had been instituted by the Benedictine monks in the early days of the construction of the Monastery in Exaquium (the Ancient name of Lessay) in order to favour the development of trade and the populating of the village that was being settled in the environs. The creation of the Sainte-Croix Fair can thus be traced back to around 1056.*

*At that time, the organisation of the fair and the responsibility of its course were under the charge of the religious heads who levied 'custom taxes' over the merchandise and 'place taxes'—also called 'market stall taxes'—for the occasion.*

*In its early days, the fair lasted only one day but then, it had its ups and downs, as was the case with many other fairs. It was certainly from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards that the fair became really important.*

*In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it became so important that changes were made to accommodate all the merchants who sometimes came from very far areas to sell their wares. In 1671, an edict by King Louis XIV increased the fair's duration to three additional days.*

*In 1771, the historical almanac of the diocese of Coutances indicated that the fair in Lessay was the most considerable in Low Normandy, following the one in Caen.*

*At the time of the French Revolution, the Sainte-Croix fair was handed over to the charge and for the benefit of the town of Lessay.*

*In 1800, the Mayor of Lessay noticed that the absence of defined spaces was causing trouble among the various vendors. Therefore, he ordered that places in the fair be allocated henceforth. Moreover, the fare for the spot would have to be paid the day before.*

*From 1880, 'The Watch'<sup>1</sup> took place on September 11<sup>th</sup>, the day before the fair to display and sell cattle (the visitors could see 30,000 animals among which 10,000 horses for the best years). There, the officers of the 'remount' came to get their supplies in horses for the year.*

*Later, the development of the communication routes followed by the arrival of the motor car transformed the design of the fair—horses were replaced step by step by tractors.*

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<sup>1</sup> At that time, places were attributed to those who would pay the most. The sale of places was then stopped after the responsible had looked at his watch.

*The fair did not know any interruption, even during the two world wars. Today, the Sainte-Croix Fair is still becoming more developed and structured. The fair has probably reached the maximum of its potential.*

**Translation/traduction : Grégory HOUDUSSE**