

Pompey, from cast iron to steel

Situated at the confluence of the Meurthe and the Moselle, Pompey is a town of some 5,000 inhabitants and has a history extending back to Gallo-Roman times. In 1872 the wine-growing village nestling round its Neo-Roman church found itself on the verge of an unparalleled upheaval.

At the time of the Industrial Revolution and the Treaty of Frankfurt, two entrepreneurs from the Moselle decided to move their steel plant from Ars sur Moselle, then in territory annexed by the German Empire, to Pompey. The village has a number of assets: a vast flat plain suitable for construction, railways and waterways.

In 1872 hundreds of workers began arriving in Pompey. 200 dwellings were hurriedly built. Shops and services sprang up and the village was transformed into a proper industrial town. Many different nationalities were represented in the workforce. The workers from Eastern Europe, Italy and the Maghreb, were the first in a long line of newcomers, as Pompey's steelworks would have a history of over a hundred years.

In the 19th century, metallurgy met the needs of the industry by providing machines and increasingly diversified equipment. To do this, it needed to produce metal in ever greater quantities. With the steelworks came two blast furnaces whose tall chimneys and thick smoke bedecked the horizon. Their function was to produce cast iron which is first made into iron.

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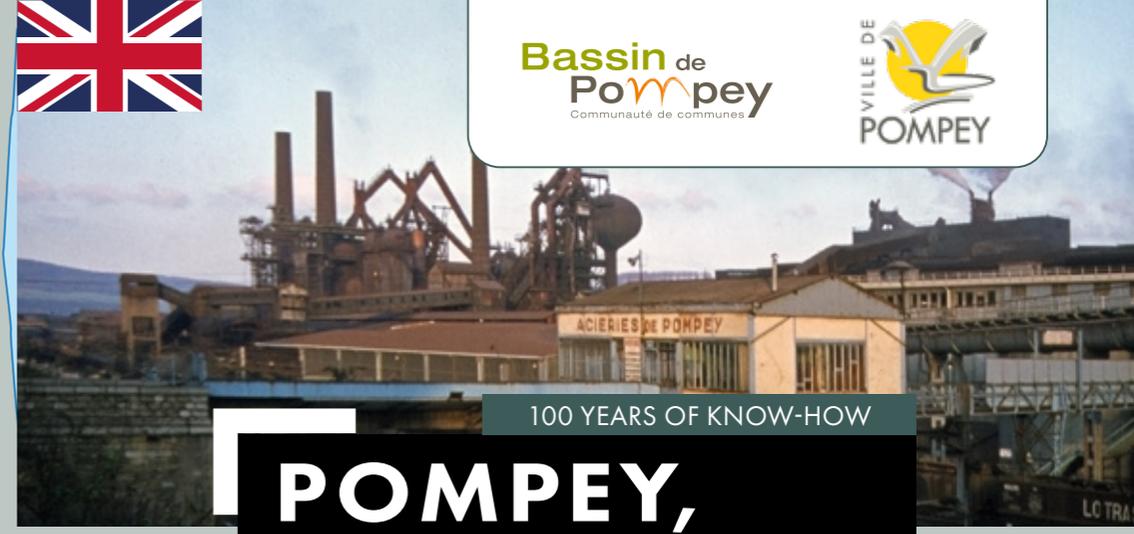


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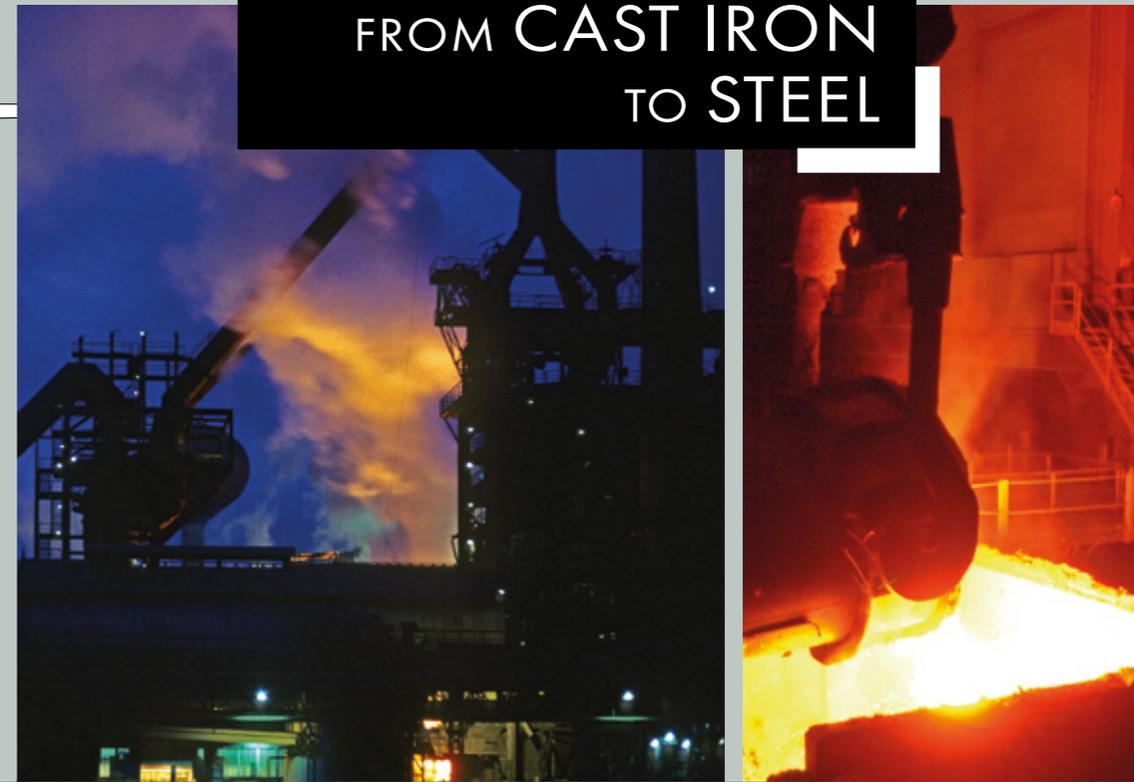


Bassin de Pompey
Communauté de communes



100 YEARS OF KNOW-HOW

POMPEY, FROM CAST IRON TO STEEL



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1 Origins of the plant

Before the steelworks was built Pompey was a wine-growing village of about 500 people. The arrival of phylloxera in the 1870s signalled the permanent disappearance of the vineyards. The opening of the steelworks in Pompey in 1872 revived the economic life of the town and radically altered its destiny. Pompey owes its transformation to two entrepreneurs: Auguste Dupont and Adolphe Dreyfus (replaced by Alphonse Fould in 1875), who originally owned a steelworks in Ars-sur-Moselle. After the Treaty of Frankfurt in 1871, they left the Moselle, which had been annexed by the German Empire, and moved their new plant to Pompey, causing the population of the town to grow from 558 in 1861 to 3,094 in 1900.

2 The blast furnaces and the steelworks

The blast furnaces

Iconic elements of the plant, the blast furnaces converted iron ore into molten iron by burning coke (mineral coal). During combustion, the heat released carbon which mixed with the iron ore to produce a new material: cast iron. After 1888 most of the cast iron produced at Pompey was destined to be made into steel, a more solid and durable metal.

The steelworks

The purpose of the steelworks was to turn cast iron into liquid steel. This was done by reducing the carbon content: cast iron contains 4% and steel between 0 and 2%. The cast iron was placed in a large container into which oxides and pressurised cold air were injected. The oxygen burnt the carbon and the cast iron was transformed into steel.



3 The rolling mills

Pompey had two types of rolling mills: roughing or blooming mills and finishing mills. Blooming converted ingots produced by the steelworks into semi-finished products called blooms. These blooms were sent to the finishing mills to be made into finished products.

These were generally flat, such as sheet metal, templates, profiles or flat beams.



4 The offices



Far from the noise and molten metal, the offices dealt with the administration of the plant. Just like any modern business, there were several different departments: planning, accounts, welfare, sales, etc.

5 The wire rod mill

The wire rod mill was a finishing rolling mill specialising in wire production. Its function was to transform semi-finished products from the roughing mills into finished products conforming to the customer's requirements. It produced steel wire at the desired diameter, ranging from 5.5mm to 65cm.



6 The research centre

The research centre was set up in 1932 by Eugène Herzog, who was its director from 1933 to 1969. The centre developed steel grades and carried out research into specific problems such as resistance to corrosion. A major asset of the Pompey steelworks was the wide variety of its products. It is estimated that 300 grades of steel were available.



7 The Bow String bridge

Built in 1951, at the same time as the Ban-la-Dame site where the wire rod mill was located, the Bow String bridge connects the two banks of the plant. It has rails and took semi-finished products from the rolling mills to the wire rod mill and the southern rolling mills situated on the other bank of the Moselle.



8 The training centre

The Pompey plant trained its own workers. Young people started their training at the age of 14. Young apprentices, known as "Arpettes", attended the training centre for four years to learn the steelworks trade.



9 Shipping

Finished products were mainly shipped to the plant's end customers by railway. Some products were sent from Pompey by road or from the port of Frouard by boat. The shipping department was managed by the plant's administrative offices.

10 Stores

Ideally situated close to the railway lines, the storage area was the last phase of order preparation before shipping. Finished products for shipping to external customers were stored here. Semi-finished products were not stored but were sent directly to the workshops.



11 Redevelopment

Lorraine was hit by the steel crisis in the 1980s and the Pompey steelworks closed for good in 1986. With the steelworks, 3,000 jobs disappeared. Then the redevelopment of the site began, and the gamble paid off. The old steel valley became the first AFNOR-certified urban industrial and technology park in Lorraine: the Eiffel Énergie estate, which accommodates 242 businesses, employing some 5,500 people.



The plant was modernised and improved throughout its existence. In 1888 it started producing steel, the metal most used in mechanical engineering, automotive engineering, construction or electrical goods industries. Benefiting from its own a research laboratory, the plant manufactured up to 300 different grades of steel.

The Pompey plant was a town within a town. In 1965 it employed 6,000 people and produced 400,000 tonnes of special steel a year. But in the 1980s France was hit by the steel crisis and in 1986 the steel works at Pompey closed for good. Many years later, the brownfield site they left behind is now one the Lorraine's leading industrial estates, employing 5,500 people.

This historical tour will help you discover the background of the steelworks which produced the iron for the Eiffel Tower, the Garabit viaduct and the Statue of Liberty. It was set up with the aid of the Pompey Memorial Group. Created in 2004 the group counts many former steel workers among its members. Since 2016 the group has been working on a large project to restore the memory of our industrial past and help more people to understand the heritage it has left us.

Enjoy your visit!

