

If you go down to the woods today...

What's in a name?

Avenue Brassine / Brassinelaan

Here in Rhode-St-Genèse, this road is a popular departure point for escapades in the Forest, be it on foot, on horse, on a bicycle and with or without a dog. Remember, dogs must be on a lead.

It runs from the Chaussée de Waterloo at Grande Espinette / Grote Hut and ends at the ring. However, it wasn't always thus. The ring severed this road from the Drève de la Ramée which continues on the other side of the ring, heading down through the Solvay park and ending at a place called La Ramée. Here's an excerpt from the Ferraris map of 1807



So did the building of the ring mean that that section of the road had to be renamed? I don't think so. Earlier this year I wrote a post about Notre-Dame de la Justice (April 20th if you want to take a look) and the original shrine was known to have been on Avenue Brassine. But was it known as this at the time?

Postcards are a great historical window and here we have the evidence needed:



So it was definitely Avenue Brassine before the ring, at least 50 years before. In fact it is even older - 'Other drives were created in the 19th century, near the Route de la Banque, but exclusively for exploitation purposes. This was the case in particular of Avenue Brassine in 1835 [Jaumain et al., 2009: 362; LAFS, 2009: 23-27, 6 5' from a document called 'When you can't see the city for the trees. A joint analysis of the Sonian Forest and urban reality'.

This date fits in nicely with the Waterloo road engineers who built many of the straight paths through the Forest's sometimes challenging terrain. The cobbles which are exposed further up the Avenue are their handiwork, the 'têtes de Napoleon' as they were known.

So this leads us nicely into the name. One plausible theory links it to the Belgian term *brassine* (Walloon/Ardennes dialect) which once referred to a **tavern or brewery**. No reason to suppose there wasn't such a place here but I'm putting my money on a link to the prominent Brassine family. There is an Avenue Charles Brassine in Auderghem, which honors a WWI lieutenant from that family but the Brassine we are looking for certainly predates this.

From 'Le Folklore Brabançon', September 1961 we have a likely candidate. I found this on page 503 (no, I didn't read it all):

Le nom de Brassine est bien connu. Pierre Brassine, capitaine-adjutant de place en Belgique, né à Watermael-Boitsfort en 1786, décédé en 1865. (Il fut le père du général et ministre de la Guerre belge.). Adjudant sous-officier d'infanterie pendant la campagne de Waterloo dans l'armée française, démobilisé en décembre 1815

His son, the more well known Jacques-Joseph Brassine (1830–1899) was a Belgian **Lieutenant-General** who served as **Minister of War** in the 1890s. But that's too late

Charles of Auderghem fame? Even later (1882 to 1918). Pierre it is.

I believe Avenue Brassine was constructed to meet Drève de la Ramée at La Belle Etoile. And that, dear Forestlings, is another story.