

At the end of my six months in France, I bought a small village house in Frayssinet-le-Gélat, just a few kilometres from Madame Murat's restaurant in Pomarède. Frayssinet is unspoiled in the sense that it has escaped the gentrification so often seen in villages where foreigners have bought properties and renovated them to the point of perfection. The picture-postcard view of rural France belies the reality of life in this region, which has often been very tough for the locals. Although blessed with glorious scenery and rich farmland, the region known as the Lot has remained relatively poor, suffering through two World Wars and periods of rural recession.

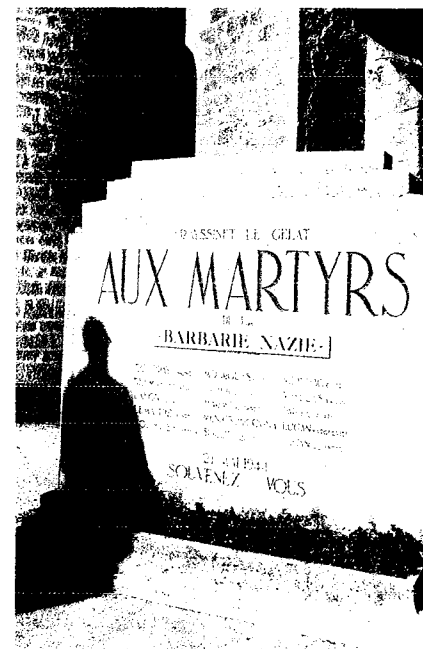
In the village there is a stark reminder of the brutality of World War II in the form of a statue and memorial outside the Romanesque church. It is dedicated to the memory of fifteen young local people murdered on that spot by German



*The entire village comes out for a postcard photograph circa 1914*

forces in May 1944. Until 2003, the inscription on the memorial described the crime as *Barbarie Allemande* (German barbarity), but the words have since been changed to *Barbarie Nazie*, a politically correct adjustment that created more than a ripple of disquiet among the village's older residents.

Frayssinet has a permanent population of 300, which increases a little during the summer when holidaymakers and foreigners who own houses take up residence. There is a small post office, these days only opened for a few hours a week; and an old-fashioned bar called Le Relais, which is run by a humorous man called Christian and is where the local *chasse* (hunters) meet regularly. The bar is most popular when sporting events such as the World Cup are being played. There is a huge flat screen at one end of the room and the locals crowd in, drinking beer and cheering for France. When there are a lot of English holidaymakers around, Christian puts a tape down the centre of the room with the English on one side and the French on the other. But it's all done in good fun! For several months in the summer, Christian also operates a bar and simple restaurant at the pretty nearby *plan d'eau* (lake). In the village there is a second bar-cum-pizzeria run by local woman, Christiane, which is often packed at lunch and dinner in the height of the holiday season.



*The imposing church and war memorial. Most of the family names listed on the memorial are still in the local phone directory.*

MEETING MADAME MURAT 5

