

# *Jeu de mail in France*

## *Région Grand Est*

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In 2015, due to a reorganisation of the French regions, the region Grand Est was formed by the following departments:

- ◆ Ardennes (08)
- ◆ Aube (10)
- ◆ Bas-Rhin (67)
- ◆ Haut-Rhin (68)
- ◆ Haute-Marne (52)
- ◆ Marne (51)
- ◆ Meurthe-et-Moselle (54)
- ◆ Meuse (55)
- ◆ Moselle (57)
- ◆ Vosges (88)



## Ardennes (08)

### Charleville-Mézières

In June 1583, Henri III and his household came to Mézières, according to Le Long, to drink mineral water. He stayed in the Tournelles Palace, and because he was advised to take exercise, he played daily jeu de mail in the pasture of Arches. When he left, he donated the materials of the mail course to the Friars Minor of Bethléem.

Fleury and Paris refer to ‘Histoire ecclésiastique et civile du diocèse de Laon, et de tout le pays contenu entre l’Oise et la Meuse, l’Aisne et la Sambre’, D. Nicolas le Long, 1783.

(Henry Fleury & Louis Paris, ‘La chronique de Champagne, deuxième année, Tome IV’, 1838)



*Plan of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Arches was situated between Charleville and Mézières in the bends of the river Meuse. – Anonymous, Musée d’Ardennes, Charleville-Mézières*

The friars used the material of the boards of the alley to build their dormitory. ('Richesses monastiques au Moyen Age à la Révolution' – Supplément au journal 'Charleville-Mézières magazine', N° 123 – octobre 2008)

### *Margut*

I found no written evidence of a mail alley in Margut. Only on a plan from the land register, several parcels bear the name 'Paulmail'. The list of possible spellings of jeu de mail in the past is long; the spelling 'Paulmail' is a possible reference to a former mail alley.



*Only on this copy of the land register is spoken from 'Paulmail'. In 1833, the alley was no longer traceable. – Margut, Parcellaire C3, Champel et Saint-Walfroy, 1833 – Archives départementales des Ardennes*

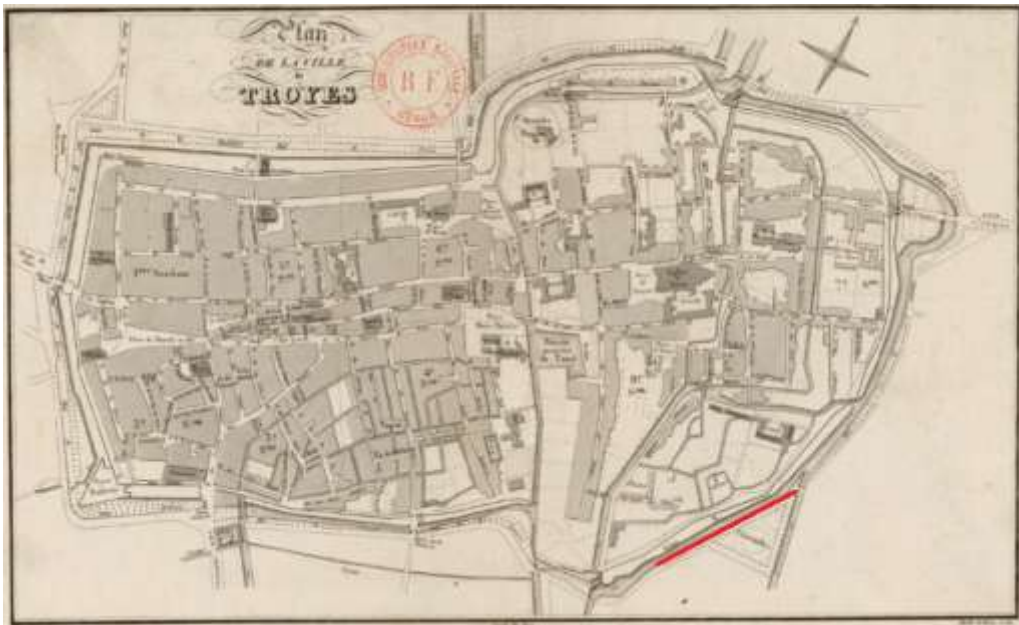
## Aube (10)

### Troyes

On a plan from 1835, all the ancient limits of Troyes were called mail. Only the Mail des Charmilles along the River Seine used to be a mail alley, shadowed by hornbeams. It was situated outside the town on the other side of the Seine. Since 1851, the mail bears this name.  
(<https://www.calameo.com>)

In 1667, a provost, named Denis, was murdered on the mail by a guest, an arrant knave, from the pub the Blason de Bourgogne.  
(*Les rues de Troyes anciennes et modernes, revue étymologique et historique*, L. Corrad de Bréban, 1857)

It is all I could find: nothing about the players or when the alley was no longer in use for the mail game.



*The red line situates the mail alley along the banks of the River Seine. —  
'Plan de la ville de Troyes', L.F. Couché, Kardt & J.M. Hacq, 1835 —  
Bibliothèque nationale de France*

## *Bas-Rhin (67)*

### *Strasbourg*

Strasbourg was a German town up to 1648, and it remained a free imperial city up to 1697, when it was annexed by France. So Strasbourg looped the French heyday for the game of mail.

Today, there are two mails in Strasbourg: Mail Charles Pierre and Mail Saint François. Information about the history of these mails, if there is any, is not available online.

## *Haut-Rhin (68)*

### *Neuf-Brisach*

On the wish list of Brisach and the details of its needs for the army from the year 1667, for the divertissement and embellishment, is mentioned a jeu de mail and the plantation of elm trees on the ramparts in the lower town for the pleasure of a promenade.

On the mail alley, there have to be planted elm and lime trees from the strappado up to the city walls of Old Brisach. The needed wood for the fence could be delivered by the local sawmill.

(‘Bulletin de la Société belfortaine d’émulation’, Collection numérique : Sociétés savantes, 1902)

If the mail alley was ever built, it is not confirmed.

## *Haute-Marne (52)*

### *Joinville*

The Château du Grand Jardin was a maison de plaisance attached to the seat at Joinville, and built between 1533 and 1546 as a grand pavilion designed for parties and entertainments.

In a detailed description of the beautiful garden, the mail alley is mentioned. It was constructed for the pleasure of the seigneurs, and where, with their permission, also the bourgeois was welcome to pass their time. (Diocèse ancien de Chalons-sur-Marne : histoire et monuments ; suivi des cartulaires inédits de la commanderie de la Neuville-au-temple, des abbayes de Toussaints, de Monstiers et du prieuré de Vinetz' 2, Edouard de Barthélemy, 1861)

## *Marne (51)*

### *Châlons-en-Champagne*

In 1609, the council decreed that the paille-maille du was to extend by 800 paces, and that at the end a bridge should be built over the River Marne. In 1671, the intendant decided that a third row of trees should be planted along the alley up to the bridge. (Source: see above under Joinville)



## *Reims*

In an account of the expenses on the patrimoine, a carpenter is paid for the two doors he made for the pallemalle, ordered in 1577 by the king. And that is all there is about Reims.

## *Sézanne*

The old town of Sézanne is located around its church, and is surrounded by a belt of six green mails with a length of 1,3 km. They were constructed at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century on the site of the filled-in fortifications from the Middle Ages. Two, three, sometimes rows of lime and chestnut trees, 410 in total. Well-shadowed against the burning summer sun. Most of them are pedestrian areas and invite people to stroll in the middle of the city.

Their names tell the history of the town: Mail des Cordeliers and des Religieuses, which remind us of the many monasteries and convents that used to be in Sézanne. The Mails du Mont-Blanc, de Provence and de Marseille recall the regiments of the Provence and the Savoie, who, on 2 September, bivouacked there after an appeal of Danton to save the fatherland.

However, the Mail des Acacias is today planted with lime trees.  
(<https://www.ville-sezanne.fr>)



Above: *The Mail de Marseille in 1908* – <https://www.fortunapost.com>

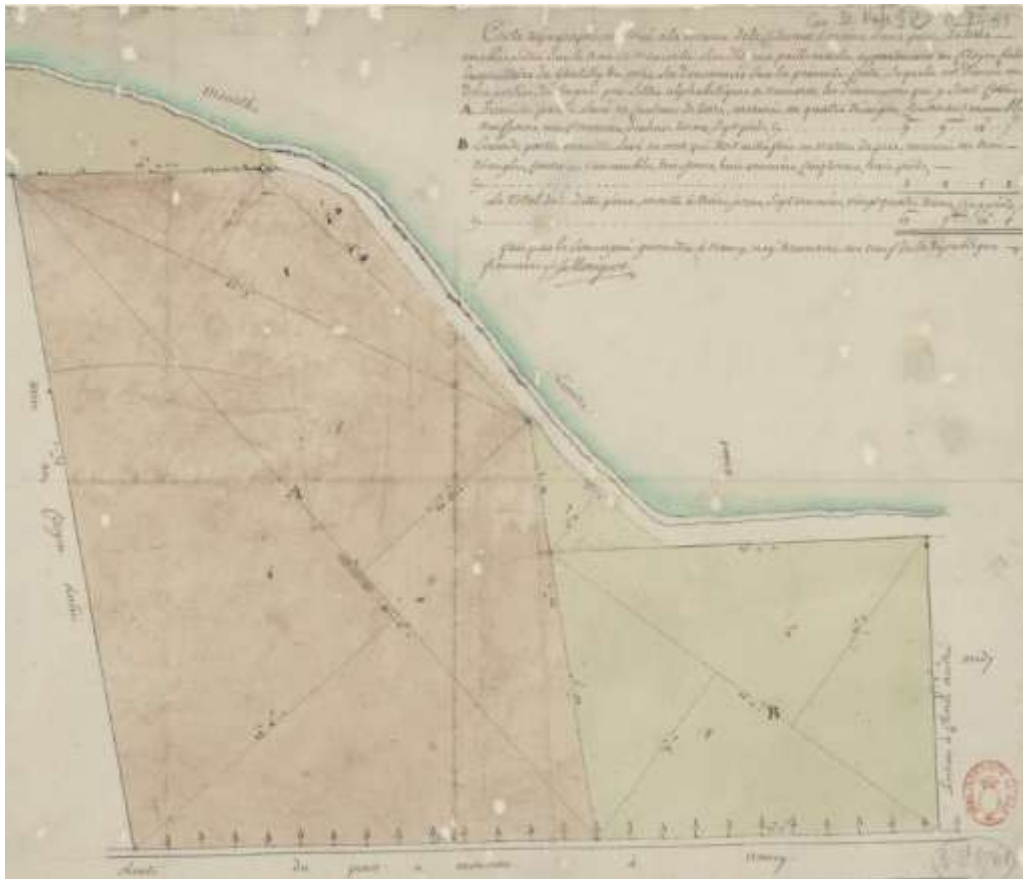
Page 6: *The red line locates the alleys that, at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, were extended southwards to the mail alley, alas not visible on this map.* – ‘*Plan routier de la Ville de Chalons-sur-Marne*’, Charles-Nicolas Varin, 1700 – *Bibliothèque nationale de France*

## Meurthe-et-Moselle

### Maxéville

Underneath a survey of a ploughable field, situated on the grounds of Maxéville, called Paillemaille. It was the property of a Mr Costes, owner of , amongst others, Gentilly. It measured 60 toises (nearly 23 hectares). It was a land surveyor from Nancy who did the job.

On the map, there are no traces of an ancient mail alley, but regarding the name ‘Paillemaille’, there once was certainly a jeu de mail on the parcel.



*Carte topographique toisé à la mesure de la cidevant Lorraine d'une pièce de terres arrables, Situé sur le Ban de Maxéville, lieu dit aux paille mailles, appartenans au Citoyen Costes, propriétaire de Gentilly, etc... 60 toises de la cidevant Lorraine, J. Mougeot, 1800 – Bibliothèque nationale de France*

## *Nancy*

The paille-maille is mentioned for the first time in 1583 in the municipal deliberations, followed by several other mentions:

1583 - Antoine de Nay paid Jean Contesse for having painted four touch stones and two arches with green oil paint for the paille-maille, constructed in this year in the Bois Saulrupt.

1601 - Agreement about the grounds cleared from undergrowth in the Bois Saulrupt on both sides of the paille-maille.

1615 - Claude Cucillet paid the young lime trees delivered to the mail master of Nancy, which had to be replanted around the paille-maille.

1626/1627 - An amount is paid for broadening the little lane going to the paille-maille in order to pass carts and two –wheeled carriages.

1667 - Charles IV donated to the town council a piece of land, named ‘aux paille-mailles’, to serve as a cemetery.

1702 - A sum is paid to the people who removed the mud, which was stockpiled in the ancient drainage of the paille-maille, which blocked the water from transporting the mud outside the city.

(Source: Archives municipales de Nancy)

Up to 1697, the paille-maille was not more than a grassy path.

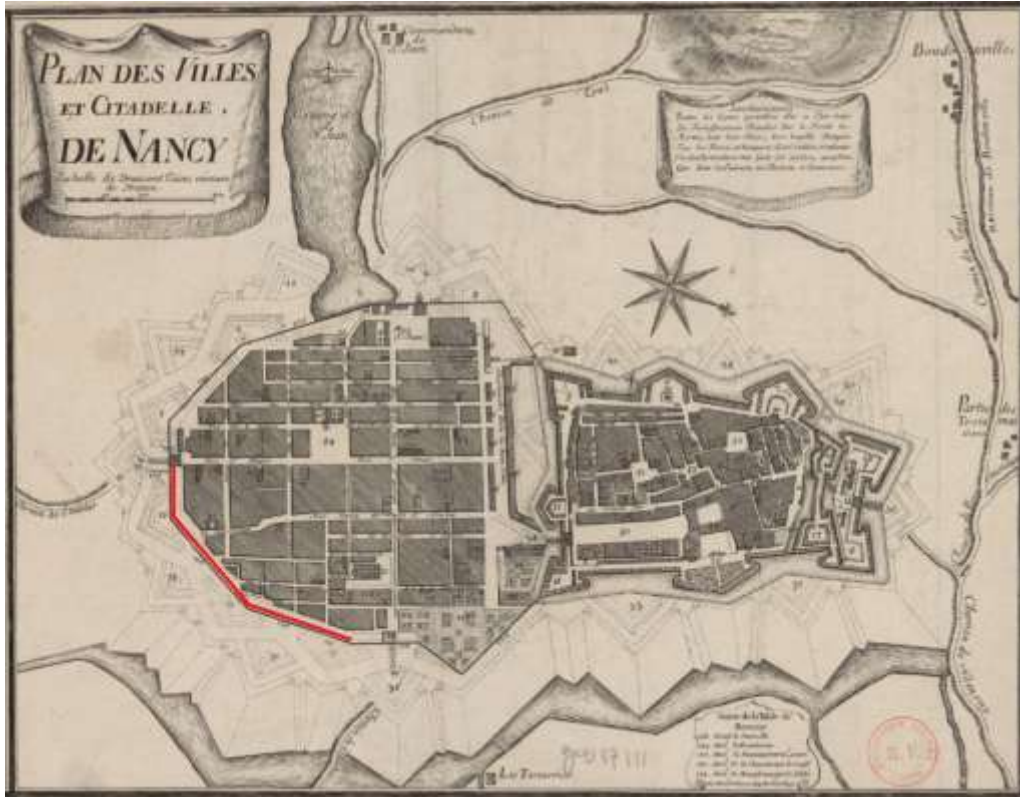
(Une maison de retraites fermées à Nancy au XVIIIe siècle , E. Bocquillion, 1910)

Not far from the paille-maille, behind the cathedral, a quarter bore the name ‘Paille-Maille’. Up to the beginning of the 20th century, this quarter had a sad and miserable aspect. There, the word paille-maille got a different meaning; the word became a byword for the poor. In the quarter lived people, who slept on ‘paille’ (straw) and were ‘sans sou ni maille’ (penniless).

(‘Histoire de Nancy. Tome 2’, Christian Pfister, 1902-1909)

The street between the Porte Saint Georges and Saint Nicolas was named Rue Paille Maille up to 1754, then Rue du Rempart, and since 1791, its name has been Rue des Fabriques, and it still has the same curves as on the map on the following page.

(‘Histoire des villes vieille et neuve de Nancy, depuis leur fondation, jusqu'en 1788, 200 ans après la fondation de la Ville-Neuve. Tome 3’, sieur Jean-Jacques Bouvier Lionnois (dit Abbé), 1811)



*This is the oldest map which I could find on which I could clearly indicate the jeu de mail. On a map from 1754, alas not sharp enough to use on this site, the red line is called Rue Paille Maille. –*

*Plan des Villes et Citadelle de Nancy’, Didier Bugnon & Augustin Calmet, 1720 –  
Bibliothèque nationale de France*

### *Saint-Nicolas-de-Port*

Some years after 1928, a railway was to be built from Toul to Blainville-sur-l’Eau. It cut straight through Saint-Nicolas and the Paille-Maille fields and woods. I could not find pictorial evidence. (*‘L’Immeuble et la construction dans l’Est : revue de la propriété et des travaux publics et particuliers : organe des intérêts régionaux, des professions, industries et commerces qui concourent au bâtiment’, directeur Emile Jacquemin, 1928-09-28*)

There still is an Allée Paille Maille not far from the present railway, so probably, a mail alley used to be there.

## *Meuse (55)*

### *Bar-le-Duc*

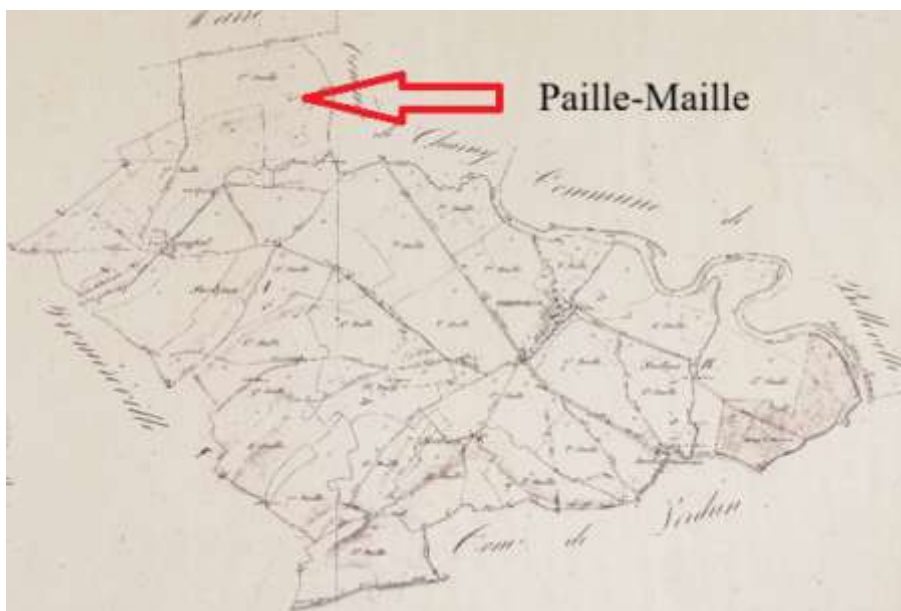
A new variant of the spelling of Paillemaille turns up in Bar-le-Duc. Frédéric Godefroy mentions in his dictionary (1880) the following synonyms Palmail, Palmaille, Palemail, Palemailie, Pallemail, Pallemaille, Paillemail, Paillemaille, Pillemaille, Parmaille.

There is a fountain called Parlemaille, giving water to the River Naveton. ('Historique de la ville de Bar-le-Duc', F.-A.-T. Bellot-Herment, 1863)

One of the three medicinal springs at Bar-le-Duc is called Parlemaille. Its steady temperature gives a certain importance from the viewpoint of hygiene and wholesomeness. ('Bulletin de l'Académie nationale de médecine', 1865)

There used to be a hamlet called Parlemaille, as up to today there is a street called Rue de Parlemaille, but no information about the mail game.

### *Thierville-sur-Meuse*



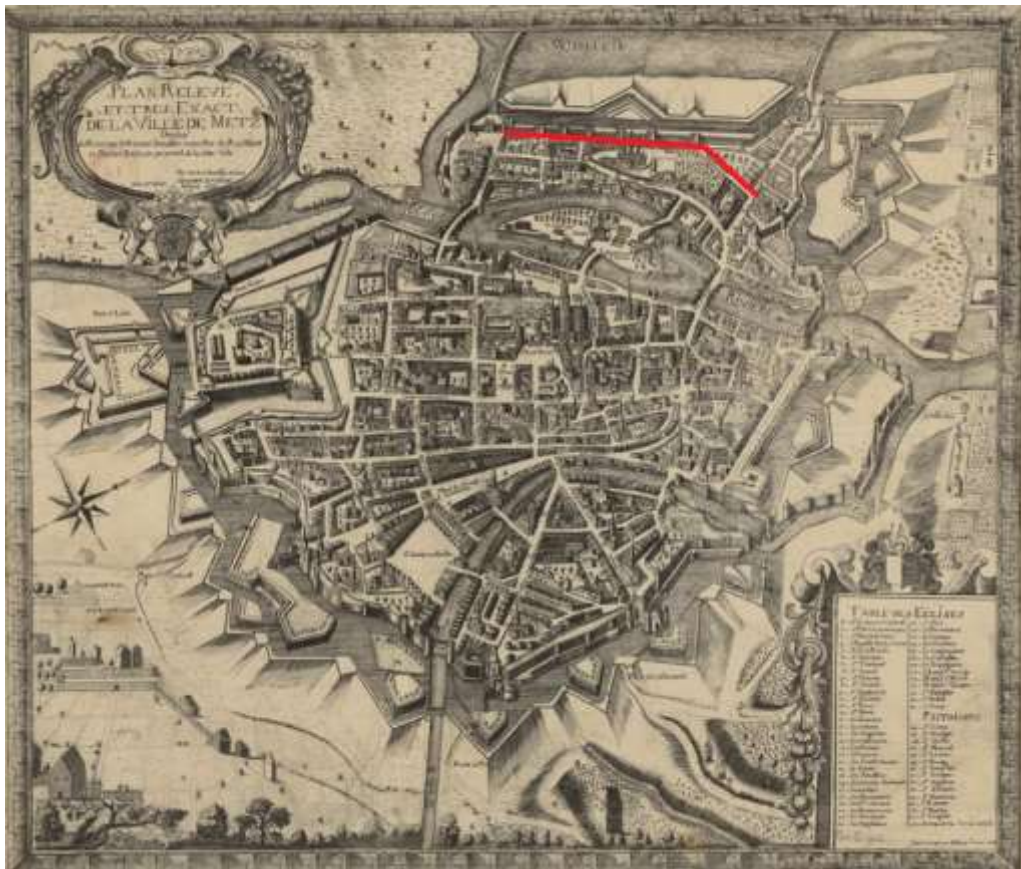
*On the land register from 1842, there is a parcel called Paille-Maille north-west of the village centre. – <https://archives.meuse.fr/>*

In a description of the territory of the town, some 100 hectares in Paille-Maille are mentioned, consisting of wasteland, fields and a large den wood. ('Bulletin meusien : organe du Groupement fraternel des réfugiés et évacués meusiens ', Comité des évacués et réfugiés meusiens., 1923)

Again, no further information about the mail game.

## Moselle (57)

### Metz



*In the north of the town, along the ramparts, is a street named Paille-Maille. – ‘Plan relevé et très exact de la Ville de Metz, Dédié à Monsieur de Ruissan, ... Maire et Maistre Eschevin perpétuel de laditte Ville’, Molina, 1696 – Bibliothèque nationale de France*

Information about when the mail alley was in use and since when is unfindable. The fact that the Paille-Maille was along the ramparts makes pretty sure that it was used for the game, but also about its players nothing is known.

## *Vosges (88)*

The department Vosges is, up to now the first department with no traces of the mail game. The Vosges is a range of medium mountains, which could explain that there are no flat mail alleys.