

# An Englishman in Grasse

## A stroll around Cours Honoré Cresp

If you have only half an hour to spare in Grasse, you can see quite a bit of our town's history just from a short walk around this large square, located just above the eponymous car park.

The Cours is immediately outside what was originally one of Grasse's main gates, the Porte Royale ('Royal Gate'), at the point where rue Ossola begins and many visitors enter the old town. The Cours has been a common area for centuries. Originally known as the Place de la Rouguière, from 1698 onwards it was bounded by the Gate at the eastern end and the town's hospital, La Charité, to the west. In 1787 it was extended by taking over what had been the garden of the Chateau Théas (see below). It has always hosted political, commercial, theatrical and musical events as well as being a gathering and walking space for the town's population.

It attained its current dimensions and name in 1906, when the hospital was demolished and the Mayor of the time, Honoré Cresp, led the creation of the paved space and balustrade which you see today. Here are what I think are the most interesting sights.

**Highlighted links** are to my blogs. There's a map showing some of the locations mentioned [here](#). You can also download this page to a PDF [here](#) if you wish.



Start here, at the beginning of the rue Ossola and just across from the car park entrance. You're looking at the start of Grasse's high street, where the Porte Royale was demolished in 1897. Walk slightly uphill, leaving the Cafe des Musées on your right, and....



...you'll see this flight of steps. Look at the little plaque on the wall. It commemorates thirty unfortunate guillotine victims of the Revolution, dating from a brief period in 1793-94 when Grasse was the principal town of the Var département. There is more about Grasse during the Revolution in my blog [here](#). Continue up the steps.



At the top of the steps, look right. On March 2nd, 1815, you would have been looking along the town walls and would have seen Napoleon's little procession of the 'Hundred Days' on his way back to Paris and afterwards Waterloo. There's a little about Napoleon's passing through Grasse in my post [here](#). The impressive yellow building on the right is now the Musée International de Parfum, but Napoleon's favourite sister, Pauline, spent the winter of 1807/08 there. I have posted about her activities in Grasse [here](#).



Before moving on, look above you. Both these smart looking buildings are now part of the Grasse Campus, but from 1845 to 1995, the one behind the palm trees was the Palais de Justice (law court). Along with the next edifice just visible on the left, these three buildings constituted a 'production line'. The right hand building was the Gendarmerie, the middle one the Court and the left hand one, very conveniently, the Prison!



Now move on a very few yards and take the short steps down on your left. In front of you is the memorial to perhaps Grasse's most famous son, the great eighteenth century painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard. The son of a glover, he had nothing to do with the eponymous perfumers, as I explain in a post [here](#).



Now walk directly away from the statue along the little square (its name is the Clavicord, or Harpsichord). The building to your right is Grasse's Palais de Congrès and Casino. It was built in 1893 as the Belle Époque-style 'Casino des Fleurs' to entertain and exploit Grasse's rich foreign and Parisian 'hivernants' (winter-residents). See more about them [here](#).



At the end of the Clavicord, take the steps to your left and cross the road on to the Cours itself. Keeping right, walk on, leaving the bandstand to your left and a little cafe to your right...



...and you'll see a fountain (without water, unfortunately). It's a real relic of the Revolution, with propaganda slogans such as "Defense de la Patrie" ('Defence of the Country'), which remind one of fascist and communist régimes. I have posted about this and others of Grasse's fountains [here](#).



Next to the fountain, but facing back the way you came, is a 'lutrín' (a 'lecturn') of a gorgeous painting by Raoul Dufy of the Cours, looking back towards the old town and the cathedral. There's more about this and other lutrins in my post [here](#).

Turning around to continue along the Cours, you'll see...



...two buildings. On the right is the Chateau Théas (aka as Chateau Roubaud), an eighteenth century house built by a local noble family. The whole area which you can see in the photograph was once its garden. The apartment block to the left replaced another large house, the Chateau Isnard, which was built on the garden in 1860.



Turn towards the left through the parked cars and look over the balustrade. The house is the Musée Villa Fragonard, where J-H Fragonard stayed with his cousin for twelve months in the early stages of the Revolution and completed one of his great works, the Progress of Love, which is now in the Frick Collection in New York. I describe how it was lost by Grasse [here](#).



Walk along the balustrade back towards the town until you see the statue of the Amiral de Grasse, who effectively determined the fate of the British army at Yorktown in 1781 and was described by George Washington as the 'arbiter' of the US War of Independence. His family were the lords of Bar-sur-Loup, just outside Grasse. There's more about him in my post [here](#).



A little further along the balustrade is this viewpoint, where you'll be rewarded by the spectacular view from the Cours right down to the Mediterranean. In case you're wondering, the concrete strip near the coast is the Cannes-Mandelieu airport.



Walk past the '#Grasse' sign and look over the balustrade again. Immediately below you is the old upper station of Grasse's funicular, which until 1938 ran directly down to the station from where you are standing. You can read about it in my [post](#) here.



Continue along to the end of the balustrade to see over the old town. The building on the right is Grasse's probably best known perfumery, Fragonard, which still retains its long redundant chimney. The bell tower of the cathedral is next to the tower (under scaffolding in this photo) of the old Bishops' Palace, which is now the town hall. The small colour-tiled pinnacle in front of it is St Thomas' Chapel, and to the extreme left down the street is the facade of the Hugues Ainé perfumery, still with the stump of its chimney above it.

If you turn left and take the steps down, you'll be back at your starting point.

