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## The rural landscape

Acquin Hill rises up beyond the village and on to the Quelmes-Boisdinghem plateau. This landscape forms an interface between the coastal plain and the "high lands", while Acquin nestles at the foot of its wooded slopes.

### Formation of the village

This view shows us the unspoilt rural setting of the village as well as its layout. The first dwellings were built along the stream that runs through the valley; sheltered by the hills, the village also had a ready supply of water. It also developed according to agrarian practices which placed the farms at the centre of the **pasture lands**. Acquin is organised **around a central node** comprising the fort and the church. Its **development and connection with the neighbouring village of Westbécourt** in 1974 has given it two focal points, from which radiate the hamlets of Val d'Acquin, Lauwerdal, Nordal and La Wattine.

Photograph by Mathilde Duval, coll. CHHP 2021.



Now, it's my turn to ask questions: what does open field mean?

Oh, it's an English term, Granny. There are more and more English words around now. The term "open field" is used to differentiate large fields from their smaller cousins which are separated by hedgerows and called the "bocage"..



### A changing valley

The **hedgerows** we see are typical of the Boulonnais countryside, called the "*bocage*". They served to retain the soil at the edge of the fields, protect crops from the wind, and prevent livestock from straying. They contained a **highly diverse range of plants and flowers** including hawthorn, holly, rosehip, and brambles. But the need for larger fields to feed the growing population, coupled with the **development of farm machinery** led to the destruction of many such hedgerows. The open field method of farming then became the norm.

### Conservation area in the uplands

The hills of Acquin are now **planted with trees** and vegetation, which was not always the case when they were farmed or used as pasture lands. The **rich biodiversity of the village and its hill** has earned it recognition at a European level. Meadows with lime-loving (calcicole) juniper and other bushes, alternate with green pastures where sheep roam free to graze. The site also plays host to some **chiroptean**s (bats) and there is actually an information board all about them just 100 metres from here. This geological heritage is protected by **eco-grazing systems**, and its fauna and flora by the *Conservatoire des Espaces Naturels* and the *Parc Naturel Régional des Coteaux de Marais d'Opale*.

The 21 main land formations of the Pas-de-Calais: Acquin-Westbécourt is indicated by a cross (map inspired by the Atlas of the region's landscapes, 2008).



In this aerial view dating from the 1960s, we can see how bare the hills were at that time (postcard, coll. CHHP).

