

A LITTLE ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

This is to help you to distinguish the three periods in the castle's history, architecturally speaking.

- The Middle Ages, the Renaissance, what has been recently restored.

The medieval castle

Try to imagine the castle as it is today, but without the parts built at the Renaissance, that is to say the front wall with the triumphal arch and the two square towers.

The KEEP must have been a simple military watchtower, without the six windows and the stone decorations that we see today on its façade (corner-stones hewn with a star-pattern, heraldic shields etc...)

Note that the two ROUND TOWERS date from the Middle Ages, but later had a Renaissance style decor applied to them, that exists to this day.

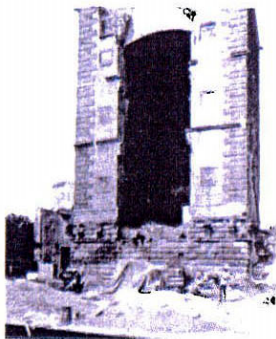
In Medieval times there was no terrace. The rampart to the front of the castle was 6 to 7 metres farther inward.

The Renaissance period

The part of the castle that dates from the Renaissance, inspired by the great châteaux of Ile de France, particularly Ecouen, was built under Jean Louis Nicolas de Bouliers between 1550 and 1556.

The front wall dates from this time, with the TWO SQUARE TOWERS at either end and the TRIUMPHAL ARCH in the middle. The façade of the medieval keep was torn down, and the two interior platforms replaced by three storeys, that have been rebuilt today. You can still see the trace of the original medieval vaults inside.

In order to match the new square towers, the corner-stones of the keep, now rebuilt, were hewn in the same style, with a star pattern. More works were started in 1559, by



order of Chretienne d'Aguerre, then again between 1608 and 1612. The impressive collection of HERALDIC SHIELDS in stone, with the arms of the Créqui-Les-Diguières (C-L-D) and the Montauban d'Agoult families, dates from this time, as well the huge cupola with its lantern-towers, crowning the square keep. This no longer exists today.

What has been recently restored

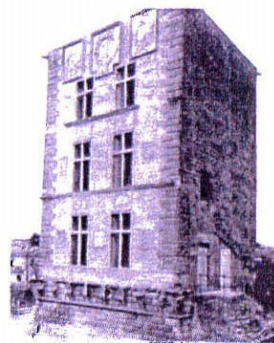
In September 1792 the castle was set alight, burned for 5 days and 5 nights, and was sacked and pillaged. It soon went to rack and ruin and even its stones were carried away for building material.

The Conseil General de Vaucluse bought the castle in 1897, and started restoring it since 1974.

More than 1000 M2 IN THE CELLAR VAULTS were cleared out and then renovated, in order to house the permanent collections, exhibitions, conference rooms, lecture rooms, etc...



As for what remained of the building above-ground : the large expanses of ruined walls were consolidated, the SQUARE TOWER TO THE SOUTH-EAST was restored and now houses the reception area, the FRONT WALL overlooking the moat was restored, as well as the terrace looking on to the Eze valley, and lastly the FACADE OF THE KEEP, along with the three storeys inside that dated from the Renaissance period.



The complete restoration of the inside of the keep is planned next, along with that of the CHAPEL in the North-Eastern round tower the ROOF OF THE TOWER housing the reception area, and lastly the COURTYARD.

Château de La Tour d'Aigues



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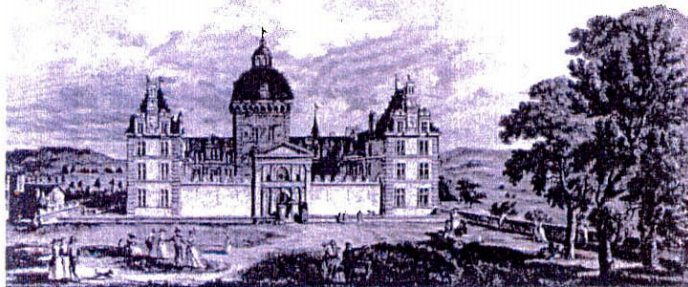


Cultural and Artistic heritage
of the Département de Vaucluse

A LITTLE HISTORY

This historic château is now just a ruin, but an impressive one. Its long and turbulent story is supposed to go back to Roman times, when a watchtower was built - but this is perhaps just hearsay. What we do know for sure dates from the 11th Century, the year 1039 to be precise, when a castle is first mentioned in the records, although we do not know where it stood exactly.

It then belonged to the Counts of Forcalquier, and later, in the 13th century, to a branch of the de Sabran family. In the 15th century it was part of the estate of the d'Agoult family, and, as the center of a rich baronetcy, was already an impressive edifice. In his inventory, dated 1491, Foulque d'Agoult talks of a keep and the two round North towers. The buildings at the South end, however, date from the 16th century.



The château having changed hands, the new owners, the de Bolliers (or Bouliers) family undertook the important transformations that were to give it its definitive appearance. In his youth, Baron Jean-Louis Nicolas de Bouliers-Cental had lived at the court of Henri II of France, and now wanted to build a château in Provence that could be compared favourably with the best that the Ile de France had to offer. He was inspired by the Louvre, Fontainebleau, Anet, and especially Ecouen, then

belonging to the Montmorency family. The plan of this castle was more or less copied at La Tour d'Aigues.

Between 1550 and 1566 the splendid square towers at either end of the South wall were built, the courtyard in front of the keep was laid out, and the keep, along with the North towers refurbished in order to match the new additions. Finally, in 1571, with the construction of the magnificent central gateway, inspired by the triumphal arches of Roman Antiquity, the building was completed.

Due to these works, the castle underwent a transformation : from brooding medieval stronghold it was turned into a sunny palace, and a centre for all worldly pleasures and delights. It was now at the height of its glory. François 1^o visited it in 1537, then Catherine de Medicis in July, 1579.

It was bought in 1719 by the de Bruny family from Marseilles. More works were then undertaken outdoors, in order to landscape terraced gardens to the East and the North. An orangery was built, as well as greenhouses, aviaries and perhaps a menagerie. There was even a Grand Canal for jousting and such water games and entertainments on the West side of the park. Jean-Baptiste-Jérôme de Bruny was quite a learned man, interested in the science of agronomy, as well as in the arts. He was a passionate collector, founded an earthenware factory at La Tour d'Aigues, and invited many interesting and famous visitors to stay, for instance Arthur Young.

Unfortunately, the castle was damaged by an accidental fire in 1780, and later in 1792 set alight on purpose by the Revolutionaries, and completely destroyed. It was left in an abandoned state, and systematically pillaged, for nearly a century, until in 1883 it was declared an "historic monument" and bought by the Departement de Vaucluse in 1897. It has been partially restored under the auspices of the Conseil General and, since 1985, has been open to the public. Now, with the various cultural events, concerts, lectures, and art exhibitions that are held within its walls, the Château de la Tour d'Aigues may be said to be once again worthy of its glorious past.

Hélène LÉZAUD - Professeur agrégé d'Histoire.

The collection of 18thC. earthenware made in La Tour d'Aigues

Towards the middle of the 18th century, Baron Jean-Baptiste Jérôme de Bruny founded an earthenware factory at La Tour d'Aigues in a building near the château, employing workers and master-workers who had come from Goult, Varages, and perhaps from Marseilles and Moustiers as well. They were to imitate the decorations, patterns and shapes used in those factories, and already much appreciated in France and abroad.



This ware, produced mostly between 1750 and 1780, can be classed in three distinct categories.

- 1) THE DISHES BELONGING TO THE CASTLE, EMBLAZONED WITH THE ARMS OF THE BRUNY FAMILY (a stag of gold against an azure field and under a ciel of gold). They are of varied shapes : plates, round and oval platters, soup tureens with their lids, sauce-boats, hors d'oeuvre dishes, etc...
- 2) The PLAIN WHITE WARE. In this category there are many objects : saucers, cylindrically-shaped pots, cups, barbers' plates, vinegar bottles, bidets, water-fountains, etc...
- 3) The DECORATED WARE, calling to mind, by the different designs used, the produce of such factories as Moustiers, Montpellier, Marseilles, Varages, Rouen, Delft, etc...

Note especially a PLATTER on which is depicted, in different shades of orange, a fox-hunting scene (after an engraving by J.B. OUDRY-1725).