

# Castel of Coudray-Salbart



## HISTORY

According to the Legend, it was Fairy Melusine who built the towers of Coudray Salbart. This medieval fortress was built at the beginning of the thirteenth century (1202-1204) by the Lords of Pathenay, with financial help from *Jean sans Terre* (King of England). It controlled the passage on the River Niortaise and the Southern border of the *Parthenay-Larchevêque* land.

**Rapidly neglected, this fortress is unique in Europe and the finest example of a thirteenth century fortress.**

In year 2000, its last private owner, the Count of *Dresnay de la Taillée*, sold the castle (which the family owned since 1776) to the *Communaute d'Agglomération du Niortais* for a symbolic franc.

Touristic management was placed in the hands of the *Association des Amis du Château de Coudray-Salbart* (ACS) who has been working since 1962 to preserve the site, which was classified as a historical monument in 1952 and 1954.

## OUTSIDE VISIT

- 1- **LA BARBICANE** is a semi-circular point of defense with a 3 meter wall above a ditch 8 meters deep. Access was via a drawbridge which went over the ditch.
- 2- **The Ditch** surrounds the lower courtyard of which the 5 meter high wall has now disappeared.  
**BOIS-BERTHIER TOWER** built after the ramparts contains the toilets (*latrines*).  
The corridor linking it to the Double Tower was originally on sloping ground (as shown by the arrow-slits and traces of blocked crenels and merlons). The higher part, built later, is horizontal.
- 3- **DOUBLE TOWER** A big almond-shaped tower which contains a smaller tower half way up, hence its double tower shape.  
Almond shaped towers are rare: two at Coudray Salbart, seven at Parthenay and three at the medieval castle of Loches.
- 4- The wall surrounds the small tower **SAINT-MICHEL** (untouched ruins of the preliminary phase of construction of the castle). A postern (to the right of the tower), is perched above a ditch 25 meters wide. At the top of the walls, ranges of holes show the presence of hoardings.
- 5- **BIG TOWER** also almond shaped, is the most impressive, 30 meters high with diameters of 12 and 16 meters. A germinate window surmounting a small crossbow looks over the South side 19 meters high. The South corridor (rampart) which dominates the *Sèvre* between the Big Tower and the Moulin Tower shows traces of various phases of construction of the corridor. The highly perched postern most likely represents the preliminary entrance to the castle.
- 6- **MILL TOWER** ends the higher courtyard of the castle. Close to the lower courtyard, it displays fine cruciform arrow slits.

## INSIDE VISIT

You will notice that the majority of the towers have holes, signs of vaults. These are traces of beams which were used as work benches for placing cement, etc. for the construction of vaults.

- 7- **ENTRANCE TO THE CASTLE** A drawbridge with check point went over the large ditch giving access to the Barbican (a semi-circular construction).
- 8- **ACCESS TO THE LOWER COURTYARD** Two towers encircled a door closed with a bar, of which we can still see the hole in which it passed through.
- 9- **LOWER COURTYARD** In this vast space, surrounded by a rampart 2 meters thick and 5 meters high, lived the majority of the inhabitants (servants and their families, pilgrims passing by...). One can see mounds: remains of domestic quarters (stables, forge, oven, soldiers' accommodation and the chapel).  
On each side of the drawbridge: two posterns enable access to the castle: the one on the left at the bottom of the ditch goes under the corridor towards an inner ditch; the right one is perched high up.
- 10- **THE DRAWBRIDGE** Access is via steps and subsequently by a bridge placed on a large pile of stones. The pedestrian drawbridge is raised by means of a simple chain which passes through the arrow slit above the entrance to the Portal Tower.
- 11- **PORTAL TOWER** The entrance is defended by a murder hole pierced in the archway of the passage. The arched barrel vault corridor looks over the Higher Courtyard.

### ON YOUR WAY OUT OF THE PORTAL TOWER

#### We propose the following way round

- 12- **ON THE LEFT, THE CIRCULAR CORRIDOR** (corridor inside the ramparts). This is pierced with crossbow supports and links up four towers. This type of defense, unique in Europe on an early thirteenth century site, is highly efficient and is said to have been imported from the Middle East during crusades.
- 13- **BOIS-BERTHIER TOWER** the ground floor is square shaped with a barrel vault. There is a chimney, three reinforced arrow slits and latrines. On the ground one can see the design of an arrow slit and a wall on which the tower was built.  
The octagonal upper room has an eight-ribbed vault ceiling and a germinate window.  
The top part was equipped with a square room. A water flowing system leads one to imagine the preliminary existence of a crenellated terrace.
- 14- **DOUBLE TOWER** is on three levels of which two are vaulted and almond shaped. The lower room has four very deep arrow slits. Signs of changes to the smaller tower are apparent : masonry work, correction of the angle of an arrow slit, an arrow slit support still visible on the ground.
- 15- **SAINT MICHEL TOWER** The lower room has an open dome ceiling (its original form, with or without an oculus is still a mystery today).  
The upper room is vaulted with a ribbed cloistered bow.  
There are two arrow slits, one of which became blocked when the castle was enlarged. Coming out, above the door, one can see a small opening which enabled control of the passage.  
It is attached to a small murder hole hidden in the ceiling.

- 16- BIG TOWER** The highest tower of the castle - 30 meters. It consists of one large square shaped reception room with an 8 ribbed vault ceiling 9 meters from the floor. Four dressed heads are visible on the ceiling. Facing South, there is a germinate window (19 meters above the ditch) with a small arrow slit which overlooks the *Sèvre*. In this tower there is a big chimney, a semi-cruciform arrow slit and toilets. Screw type steps enabled one to access the top of the tower. The top was most likely covered with a roof of tiles. On the floor, close to the door, one can still see signs of the preliminary tower within the big one.
- 17- When Crossing the Higher Courtyard.** On the ground, constructions still visible indicate placement of a preliminary castle (early 13<sup>th</sup> century) with a ditch on the North side.
- 18- MILL TOWER** The entrance is protected by a murder hole. The tower presents two identical levels: a quadrangular defense room with 3 arrow slits and a ribbed vault placed on columns decorated with *palmettes*. On the South West side, a column shows a human face holding two daggers above its head. In the upper room, the ribbed vault leans on 4 sculptures of very expressive human faces. This first floor communicates with the covered ways and operates the entrance murder hole. Holes are visible on the ceilings: the one on ground level could be a small murder hole in front of the steps and the one in the upper room is most likely a “megaphone”. The summit of the tower was a terrace tiled in three inclined sections for the evacuation of rainwater.
- 19- PORTAL TOWER** To the left, steps lead up to the upper room. Square shaped with barrel vault, it contains a chimney and latrines. One finds a restored winch which was used to pull up the drawbridge. High up on the East side, one can see steps and an opening, the function of which remains unknown.

**Thank you for your Visit...**