

The Chateau de Gisors:

A Photo-Essay

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Text translated and amplified from http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Château_de_Gisors by Christopher W. Tyler

The River Approach



Origins

The origins of this fortress overlooking the valley of the Epte, at the eastern edge of the Duchy of Normandy, date back to the surrender of Normandy, Brittany and the Vexin to Rollo, King of the Vikings, in 911 by Charles the Simple, King of France, as the price for lifting Rollo's siege of Paris and Chartres.

An earthenwork motte was built at Gisors from 1097 by Robert II de Bellême, by order of William Rufus, King of England (as the ruler of the Duchy of Normandy following the English conquest in 1066).

The Grassy Moat



This structure was supplemented a year later by a wooden tower, probably surrounded by a palisade. In 1113, this fortified site hosted a meeting between Louis VI, the King of France, and Henry I Beauclerc, the King of England, at the Elm of Gisors, in the valley below the castle. Gisors became the defensive heart of the Vexin region, the frontier zone between the English and French territories.



The Encircling Ramparts



The castle experienced its first siege in 1120, during the rebellion against the Norman lords against the English guardianship. The fortress, defended by Governor Robert Chandos, held up well against this siege, sending a serious warning that led the English king to judge it safer to reinforce the fortifications, beginning the work in 1123. The first reconstruction campaign saw the addition of an octagonal keep (or donjon), surrounded by a stone rampart (the lower bailey).



An Anglo-Norman Stronghold

Henry I Beauclerc died in 1135 of a surfeit of lampreys, leaving no male heir (despite having had three legitimate and more than 20 illegitimate children). His oldest daughter, Empress Matilda, widow of the German Emperor Henry V, married the noble Angevin Geoffrey of Anjou, who had become Duke of Normandy, while at the same time the throne of England was entrusted to Stephen of Blois.

. . . and the View from the Moat



The Plantagenets

The death of the Stephen in 1154 without a male heir left the Geoffrey's son, Henry of Anjou, as the new king of England, and inaugurated a new era: that of the Plantagenets. Henry had just married Eleanor of Aquitaine, immediately following her contentious divorce from Louis VII, King of the French. Henry and Eleanor thus became the rulers of a vast territory extending from England through Normandy and Anjou south to the Pyrenees.

To seal the reconciliation between the two kingdoms, a treaty was agreed between the new King of England and Louis VII of France in 1158 at the castle of Gisors, in which the Louis granted Henry II's the younger son Henry the hand of his daughter Marguerite, aged only six months, who was at that time Duchess of the Vexin, delivering the fortress of Gisors as her dowry.

features of the Templar Chapel



Gisors as a Templar Stronghold

In anticipation of the significance of the Capetian/Plantagenet marriage, the stronghold was given to the Order of the Knights Templars, along with two other castles. The three Knights Templars responsible for ensuring the fortress were Robert Piron, Tostes Saint Omer and Richard Hastings. Accordingly, since 1160, when Henry ordered the celebration of the wedding, Gisors was returned to Normandy.

Lower Bailey Bastions



The strategic nature of this part of the valley of the Epte did not escape the notice of the French King, and a new campaign of reconstruction was undertaken in 1170, lasting ten years. During this prolonged period, the tower was consolidated and extended with two additional floors while at the same time the moats were enlarged. A new rampart wall, 800 meters long and flanked by eight bastion towers, was completed to protect the site.

Grilles



Alice of the Vexin

Princess Alice was used as a pawn for the acquisition of demesnes through Western Europe, particularly in relation to the disputed territory of the Vexin. She was first engaged to her own stepbrother, Eleanor's son Richard with her second husband Henry II, since the marriage to Richard would also give the French King a claim on the territory of Aquitaine that he had lost with his divorce from Eleanor. Alice was sent to live in the English court of Henry II, which involved travelling with the court ladies among the various royal castles in Normandy, Anjou and England. Negotiations continued until The Duchy of the Vexin passed to Marguerite's newborn sister, Alice; Henry and Marguerite were married for only nine years until Henry died after fomenting a revolt against his father.

The Barbican



Alice was aged 15 when Richard (who, however, showed no inclination to go ahead with the marriage because he suspected that his father had already had a relationship with her) acceded to his mother's arrangement to marry him to a princess of Navarre named Berengaria, effectively breaking the engagement to Alice. At this point, Richard's father Henry attempted to marry Alice himself in 1174 (after his own break-up with the combative Eleanor, who was first for and then against the intended marriage).



Outer Ward Bulwarks



When that option became unfeasible, he tried to marry Alice to Richard's brother, John, who also rejected the arrangement, so she returned to the French court. Eventually, in 1195, Alice's half-brother King Philip Augustus of France arranged her marriage to William IV Talvas, the Count of Ponthieu (near Calais), who represented the senior line of the lords of Montgomery, trusted vassals and allies of William the Conqueror. The Duchy of the Vexin, however, apparently remained with Alice, passing to her daughter Marie of Ponthieu and claimed as part of the dowry of her granddaughter, Eleanor of Castile, who became the beloved, but acquisitive, wife of Edward I, King of England.

Views of the Donjon



Annexation by King Philip Augustus

In 1188, on the eve of the Third Crusade, an encounter between the royal sovereigns Henry II and Philip Augustus, the new King of the French, took place at the Elm of Gisors, at which a truce was agreed. However, Henry died the following year and Philip was accompanied by his successor Richard the Lionheart, in the Capetian Crusade to fight in the Holy Land. When Richard was imprisoned in Dürnstein at the end of the crusade, the opportunity was too good for the French sovereign, who captured the fortress in 1193, and ordered several modifications, including the construction of the Prisoner Tower, inspired by the Chateau of the Louvre, the barbican facing the city, and the royal manse, destroyed in the early twentieth century.

Scaling the Donjon



When Richard the Lionheart was released in 1194, he took up arms to recover his fief. However, both parties choose appeasement and signed the peace treaties of Vaudreuil and Issoudun in 1195, complemented the following year by the Treaty of Gaillon, which placed the Vexin - and therefore Gisors - under the authority of the crown of France. To compensate for the loss of several of its strongholds and try to protect his lands, Richard then began building the formidable stronghold of the Château Gaillard, built in just two years on a promontory overlooking the Seine.

Casement and Dungeon Entry



The Templar Prison

Deprived of its strategic significance, the castle of Gisors was then transformed into jail. It welcomed famous guests in the wave of arrests of the Knights Templar: the fortress became, from March 1310 to March 1314, the whereabouts of the Grand Master of the Order, Jacques de Molay, joined in dungeons of the castle by three other dignitaries of the order: Hugues de Pairaud, Geoffrey de Gonneville, preceptor of Poitou and Aquitaine, and Geoffrey de Charney, Preceptor of Normandy.

Views from the Upper Bailey



Reconquest by the English

In 1419, a three-week siege by Thomas, Duke of Clarence effected the reconquest of the castle by the English, who remained in control until 1449.

Acteon Emblem



Return to the Crown of France

Gisors was returned to the crown of France at the end of Anglo-French 100-years' war, after which the castle lost its strategic function and was gradually neglected. The fortress was subsequently decommissioned in 1591.

T I M E L I N E

From prehistory to Antiquity

The Prehistoric and Neolithic in the Vexin

- 100,000 BC: First human tribes arrive from the south between persistent periods of glaciation. These early occupants carve bone and stone. They also know how to fish, hunt and control fire. Funeral rites of these early occupants are telling: they leave food and everyday objects into the pit, with the hope that the deceased will live another life in the hereafter.

- 2000 BC: The first stable groups nearby in the form of villages. Archaeological excavations have revealed that habitat type as well as Andelys Pitres. These habitations consist of wattle and daub, held vertically by rows of columns. They frequently contain tools such as axes, scrapers and flint cutters.

- 1500 BC: The stone age: the erection of menhirs and covered walkways, many in the adjoining regions (Boury en Vexin, Lavillettertre, Sorts Castle Dampmesnil ...)

Arrival of a Celtic Population: the Vellocasses

- 800 BC: the arrival of Celtic populations brought the mastery of iron. They integrate with the local population.

- 300 BC: Arrival of Vellocasses, Celtic population came from overseas Rhine. They settled north of the Seine between the Epte and Andelle. They are both farmers and warriors. Their territory grew gradually and included all of Caux and Bray. The Vellocasses settled on the banks of the Seine where he founded the city of Rouen.

- 50 BC: Roman Invasions on land Vellocasses. In the beginning of Romanization, Romans baptize this earth as the

land of Vilcassinus. Implementation of Villae and curti (agricultural settlements) in forested areas. The presence of these farms are recognized in the village names ending in -ville or -court. 100 villae were identified around Chaumont en Vexin.

I and II century AD: The Norman land is part of the Second Lyonnaise. Its capital is Rotomagus (Rouen). A paved path, the Causeway Caesar extends to Rotomagus Lutece. Paths linking Gisors in Chambly, Marines and Gournay en Bray by Sérifontaine.

284: The Saxons came to settle around the Second Lyonnaise. The Vexin is then still part of the imperial Gaul defended the Roman Aetius. The latter combines with the Franks to fight against the Huns.

486: Clovis becomes King of the Franks in the triumphant Roman prefect Syagrius. His son Clotaire inherited Neustria including the Vexin.

In the Middle Ages

Anglo-Norman Vikings

911: Treaty of Saint Clair sur Epte:

Following numerous invasions (Vikings, Hungarians, Magyars), the power of the King of Neustria is weakened. To solve the Viking problem, Charles III the Simple decides to sell Normandy to Rollo, son of exiled King of Norway. In exchange for land, Rollo became vassal of the King of France and converted to Christianity. The eastern boundary of the territory of Rollo is materialized by the Epte flowing through Gisors. It separates the land of the king of Neustria and those Normans.

1066: Battle of Hastings: William the Bastard says, helped by forces from Norway, seizes the throne of England held by his cousin Harold.

This battle will be crucial implications on the origin of the Anglo-French conflict. The strategic role of Gisors grows, becoming the city border area between the two kingdoms, the face of England than France.

Gisors is also the nearest English town of Paris, located only 70km from the capital of the kingdom of France.

1090: Beginning of the campaign to fortify the valley of the Epte, initiated by William the Conqueror.

1097: King William Rufus of England decided to build the fortress of Gisors erection of the mound and construction of its wooden crown (watchtower surrounded by a fence).

1123: The war between the King of France and King of England back in 1116. The military governor of the city of Robert Candos, spread a fire to prevent it from falling into the hands of Louis VI.

Gisors under the Plantagenets

1144: Geoffrey Plantagenet, Duke of Normandy abandon the King of France Louis VII the castle of Gisors. Geoffrey is married to Matilda, daughter of Henry I King of England, heir to the crown. The throne of England is in the hands of Etienne de Blois, his uncle, he will sell at his death in 1154.

1150: Henry II, son of Geoffrey became Duke of Normandy. Two years later, he married Eleanor of Aquitaine. In 1154, he became King of England.

1158: Louis VII received Thomas Becket who proposes marriage to Henry the Younger (son of King Henry II of England) with Marguerite de France.

The Treaty stipulates that Gisors and the Vexin Normand Neaufles will be Marguerite's dowry. Marriage is far from being celebrated as the couple has barely ten years together.

1160: The Treaty of Chinon relates that the king of France keep the Vexin Normand until marriage. Gisors is pledged peace to the custody of three Templars, Robert Pirou, Tostes Saint Omer and Richard Hastings.

1161: Henry II obtained a dispensation from Pope Alexander III to celebrate the marriage of his children. The King of England then retrieves Gisors.

1166: Interview with Henry II and Louis VII Gisors.

From the Renaissance to the present day

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a village rich merchant

1528: Francis I erected the field of Gisors county, in favor of his cousin Renee de France, Duchess of Ferrara, daughter of Louis XII, in exchange for the duchy of Brittany that she demanded.

1555: On November 25, King Henry II of France offers the city three lilies to thank Gisors loyalty that he shows people.

These lilies are still visible on the crest of the city. This entry shows the royal political importance of the city of Gisors at that time: the city is part of the 100 French cities visited by the kings of France in the sixteenth century.

1590: During the Wars of Religion, Henry battling against the Leaguers around Paris

1593: According to legend, the priest of Gisors Pierre Neveu abjuring Protestantism to Henry IV refused entry if the

church did not consent to kneel in front of the main gate and worship the Cross. Henry consented.

1571: the work of the church are abruptly stopped by lack of funding.

1605: Sully, minister of Henri IV castle of Gisors downgrades French military sites.

1634: The clothiers Gisors were rich and numerous sixteenth and seventeenth century. Following a dispute with the clothiers of Chaumont, a judgment of the King's Council intervenes to keep the market at Gisors, which was held every Monday with prohibition for merchants to keep Chaumont market the same day. A Gisors, Monday is market day remained.

1693: Birth of a linen factory in Gisors périclitera that soon, in 1750, no longer exists.

1742: Birth of the Duchy of Gisors in favor of Charles Louis Auguste Fouquet Earl of Belle Isle and little son of Nicolas Fouquet.

1770: Birth of an Empire General From Blanmont

1792: Assassination of around Gisors Louis Alexandre Duc de la Rochefoucauld, former chairman of the Department of Paris.

The Romance of the Templars

1820: Publication of the first volume of the series Voyages pittoresque and romantic in Old France, written by Charles Nodier and illustrated by Taylor and Cailleux.

Nodier page uses an ancient oral tradition that wanted an innocent prisoner was locked in the dungeon for thirty years, leaving behind an impressive set of bas-reliefs.

1862: the castle of Gisors becomes a historical monument.

1870: the Prussians invade the city of Gisors with 4,000 men.

1940: In June, German bombardments destroyed half the city, but save the castle.

1941: at the beginning of the year, the keeper of the castle, Lhomoy Roger, began his excavations in the mound after obtaining official permission of Fine Arts and unofficial permission of the municipality.

1946: Lhomoy reported the fabulous discovery, buried under the mound of the keep, of a chapel containing precious metal chests, sarcophagi and stone statues of the twelve apostles.

1962: The release of Gerard de Sede's book "The Templars are Among Us", inaugurating a year of delirium Templar at Gisors.

Gisors Cathedral



Gisors, 1188. A place and a date that, with the publication of “The Da Vinci Code”, has attained mythic proportions. In 1188, the majestic elm of the town was cut down. In the area of Capville, today the station of Gisors, an old elm tree formed the main attraction of the town (Régnier, L. “Histoire de Gisors”). Peter of Tarantaise performed miracles here. Kings sat in its shade. It was from here that the archbishop of Tyre preached the crusade. Philippe Auguste and Henry of England, sworn enemies, embraced and cried.

In 1946, Roger Lhomoy, the guardian of the castle since 1929. claimed to have discovered a subterranean chapel, underneath the keep of the castle of Gisors, which contained the treasure of the Knights Templar. Though something of a local phenomenon, few expected the statement that he made: “I have discovered under the keep a Roman chapel in stone of Louveciennes, 30 metres long, 9m wide and about 4.50 metres high. The altar is in stone, as well as the tabernacle. On the walls, at mid-height, are statues of Christ and the twelve apostles. Along the walls, posed on the ground, are 19 sarcophagi, in stone, 2 metres long and 60cm wide. In the nave, there are 40 metal coffers, arranged in columns of ten. It’s a fantastic sight, which I invite you to come and see.” According to Lhomoy, the chapel he had discovered was the chapel of St Catherine, about which local stories and legends were known to exist.

The discovery was the result of a dangerous and apparently personal obsession. Lhomoy had begun his search by entering a well in the courtyard of the keep, a well that descended 40 metres deep, at least after he had cleared the block. He opened it, but at one point during these works, he broke his leg – everyone agrees that the work was so dangerous, that he could have easily died. The local guide still tells this story to the visiting tourists, but does not mention Lhomoy by name.

Once healed, Lhomoy continued, beginning a second hole, a short distance from the well. He made a vertical gallery of 16 metres, then a horizontal gallery of 9 metres, and another vertical gallery of 4 metres. “The mole” had to climb the height of a six story building to return to ground level.

When in March 1946 he therefore invited people to “come and see” for themselves, only one person did enter: Emile Beyne, a 59-year-old captain of the fire brigade and a future mayor. He, however, did not descend to the very end.

It seems that no-one was able to verify Lhomoy’s claim, but he was believed – to some extent. Over the following ten years, Lhomoy therefore continued carrying out illegal excavations. Today, the tourist is led into the “caves” of the castle, where there is still ample evidence of Lhomoy’s various attempts to gain entrance from the underground storage rooms into the motte of the castle, in an effort to reach the chapel that he claimed to have found inside it.

Fortune changed for Lhomoy, when in 1962, Gérard de Sède first wrote an article for a magazine and then a book on the mystery: “Les templiers sont parmi nous”. De Sède would later go on to write about the mystery of Rennes-le-Château and the Priory of Sion. What is less known, is that as early as 1962, Pierre Plantard, the soon to be self-proclaimed Grand Master of that Priory, was not merely on the scene, he was actually the official “business representative” for Lhomoy; in de Sède’s book, Plantard features in an appendix, explaining a rather esoteric interpretation of the castle’s layout. Those later claiming to be the descendants of the Knights Templar were indeed amongst them.

In May 1962, André Malraux, Minister of Culture, stated that the grounds would be closed to the public and that an official investigation would begin. On October 12, 1962 – coincidentally the day before that fateful October 13, so associated with the Knights Templar – Lhomoy was told to descend into his hole, to where his tools were still lying, in what was shown to be a dead-end. Instead of an underground chapel, there was a blank wall.

A second official excavation campaign began on February 10, 1964, when Pierre Messmer, Ministry of Armies, used the 12th regiment of the Genie, stationed in nearby Rouen, to once again attack the same area of the keep, in yet another effort to penetrate into “the chapel”. On May 12, 1964, an official communication read that “the decision was made to dig in Gisors, to verify certain assertions related to the presence of a treasure underneath the keep. Today, the work has been completed. They have had a negative result.”

From <http://www.philipcoppens.com/gisors.html>