

# FOCUS

# THE CLOCK

# TOWER

# IN DINAN



**OVER  
THE CENTURIES**

**VILLES  
& PAYS  
D'ART &  
D'HISTOIRE**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 3 THE CLOCK TOWER  
THROUGH THE CENTURIES
- 5 VISITING THE MONUMENT
- 6 THE TOWER
- 7 HAMZER MECHANISM
- 8 THE BELLS
- 10 1771 : A DIFFERENT CLOCK TOWER

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archives : p. 10,11.

# THE CLOCK TOWER THROUGH THE CENTURIES

**1. View of the clock tower  
in the XIX century.**  
*Coll. 1983-01-08,  
Museum of Dinan.*

For more than five centuries, the clock tower overlooked the historical city of Dinan. Built to symbolize the rising political power of the city bourgeoisie, with a height of 43 metres, the tower is one of the outstanding buildings to see along the Rance river.



## **DINAN, A MERCHANT CITY**

Founded around 1040, Dinan rapidly became a centre for good production and redistribution. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, agricultural products, such as the wine matured on the Rance river, were exported to England and Flanders but replaced by woven hemp cloth as the major export in the fourteenth century. In the meantime, the privileges granted by the dukes of Brittany strengthened the attractiveness of the city fairs and markets and reinforced the economic importance of Dinan.

## **THE RISING AUTHORITY OF THE BOURGEOISIE**

In 1283, Dinan became a ducal city. The city was prosperous and the Dukes sought the support of the bourgeoisie. John the Fourth, Duke of Brittany and a victor of the Succession War of Brittany (1341-1364), granted some liberties and privileges to keep the support of the middle class in his so called “good cities”, including Dinan,. At the end of the fifteenth century, the urban community gained structure. Old texts show the existence of a burgher’s council, ruled by a burgess procurator, assisted by a city clerk in charge of the first town accounts.

## **FROM A MUNICIPAL TOWER...**

Even if the sources are incomplete, it is a tradition to say that Duke Francois the Second authorized Dinan’s middle class to create a town hall. It is also said that Jehan de Rosnyven, Governor of the city from 1471 to 1481, laid the first stone.



**1. Appointment of Sieur Charles Duclos, Sieur du Clos, to the post of mayor of Dinan on 9th July 1744. Museum of Dinan**

Rather modest, the municipal tower, with a height of 43 metres, remained for centuries the highest building of the city, higher even than the steeples of the churches but above all and symbolically, the chimneys of the ducal keep.

### ... TO THE BELFRY

In 1500, the city reinforced its power with the creation of a tribunal. Seven years later, thanks to Anne de Bretagne, Duchess of Brittany, the municipal tower became a belfry. After Rennes and Fougères, Dinan is the third city in Brittany to receive this privilege. On this occasion, the Duchess, together with the Viscount of Rohan, governor to the city, sponsored a bell called «Ann». The Hamzer clock, manufactured in 1498, bears the name of a German clock and watchmaker. It substituted the parish church bells by ringing every quarter hour and gave Dinan's bourgeoisie the measure of the hour.

### THE MUNICIPALITY UNDER THE ANCIEN REGIME

In 1619, the King of France Louis XIII granted rules to the municipal assembly. Twenty advisors, six aldermen, a clerk and a treasurer formed the city council. The office of mayor was created in 1672. Alternately venal or elective, the executive function of mayor became more and more important until the eighteenth century.

In 1636, the famous traveller Dubuisson Aubenay mentioned in his travel diary a tribunal held in the first level of the clock tower. However, the

meetings of the city council took place in the second level up to the French Revolution (1789). The archives were stored in poor conditions and, according to the minutes of a meeting held in 1780 «the room where the deliberations of the city council being extremely damp, the only way of preserving the archives would be to heat the room but the fireplace is unsuitable»...

### A SYMBOLIC MONUMENT

During the French Revolution the council assembly moved to various places and finally left the old tower in 1794. Without any real purpose during the nineteenth century, its bell rang the alarm in 1907 when Dinan suffered its last major fire which destroyed five half-timbered houses. Classified as an historical monument in 1910, the clock tower, and that of Fougères, became the last civil belfry in Brittany, and reopened to the public in 1932. It offers a magnificent view of the medieval city and welcomes thousands of visitors every year.

**1. The first floor of the clock tower.**

**2. The sculpted entry porch from the Rue de l'Horloge.**

**3. View of the tower from the Passage de l'Horloge (the Tower Passage way).**



## VISITING THE MONUMENT

The interior of this austere-looking building, which resembles a keep, is rather functional. But the outstanding sculpted porch between the Rue de l'Horloge (Clock Street) and the small yard facing it, shows its ostentatious nature.

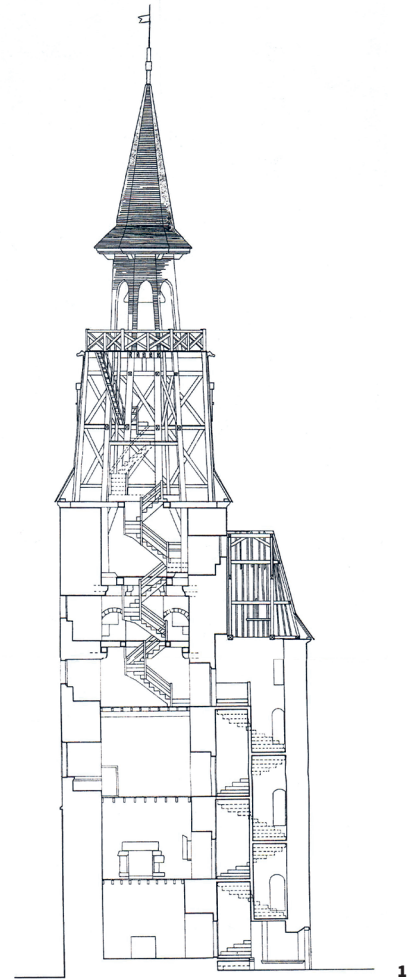


**1. Sectional drawing  
of the clock tower.**

## THE TOWER

Built on a floorplan of eight square metres, the clock tower has an octagonal floorplan from the 4th floor. It is topped by an octagonal spire made of thick slates quarried in Sizun. A spiral staircase in the turret in the west facade, with 73 granite steps, leads to the different levels of the tower. It is then followed by a wooden staircase. The turret is capped with a semi pepper box shaped roof, with a double slope.

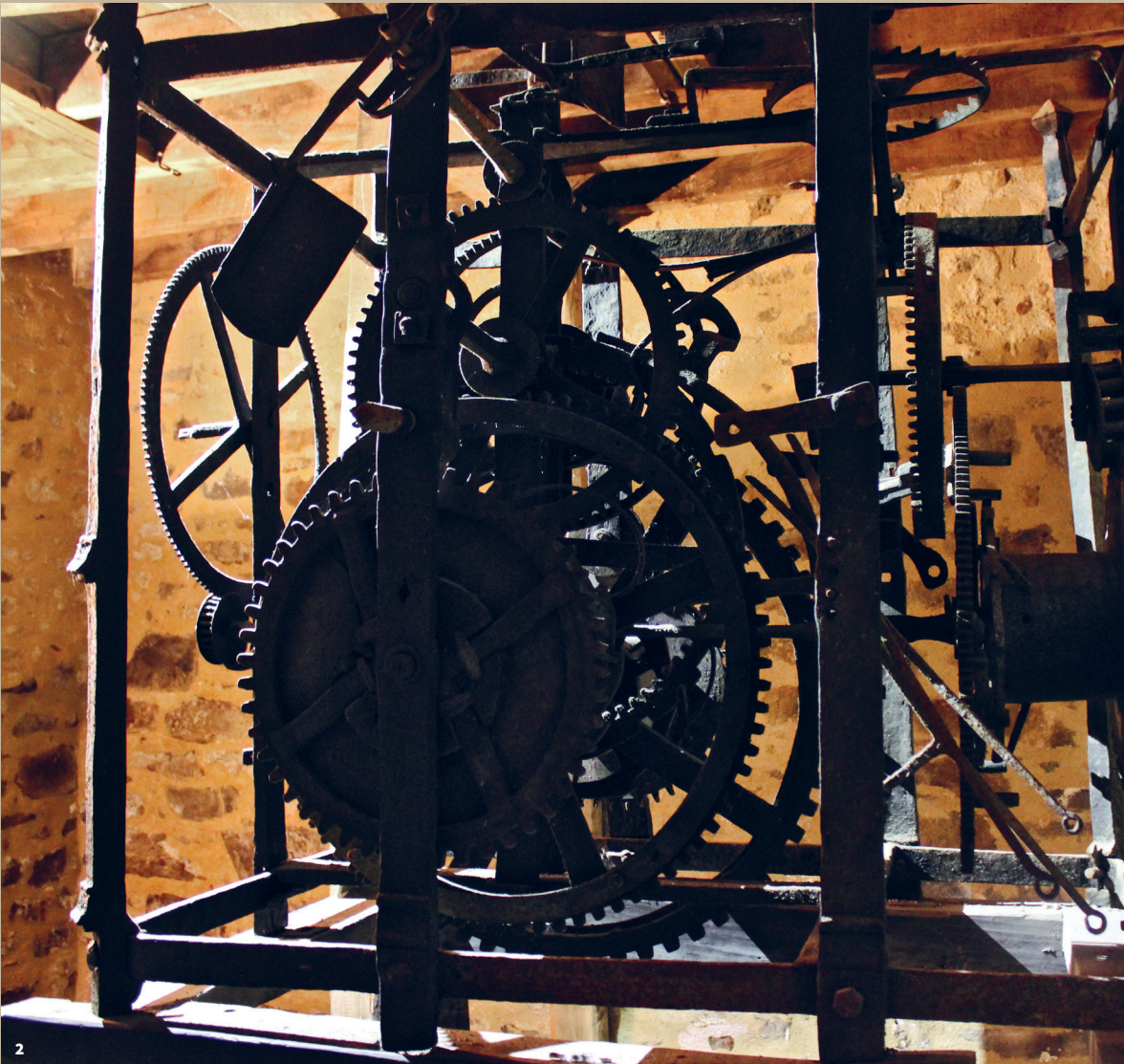
The small rooms are lit by windows set into the thick walls and contain stone benches. Small chimneys gave limited comfort, as, according to a testimony of 1780, « *one couldn't stay inside for very long without feeling an intense and unbearable cold* ».



## THE HAMZER CLOCK

The impressive mechanism of the clock, manufactured in 1498 by the German clock maker Hamzer, is now on the ground floor of the tower. The mechanism is made of wrought iron and its oldest part is totally pegged. It was then composed of a dial with the hours hand only ; behind this was the bell-striking mechanism and the movement mechanism. The counterbalance stone is still visible on the floor. According to an account of 1681, the yearly wages of the clock-maker were 33 livres ...three livres more than the yearly wages of the council clerk.

**2. Clock maker Hamzer  
mechanism, kept in the  
clock tower.**



- 1. The bell named «Ann» was melted down in 1906.**
- 2. View of the city and Saint Malo church from the clock tower.**
- 3. Bell cast in Villedieu (1823).**

## **THE BELLS**

In 1507, Duchess Anne de Bretagne gave her name to the main bronze bell. The following inscription is written on it :

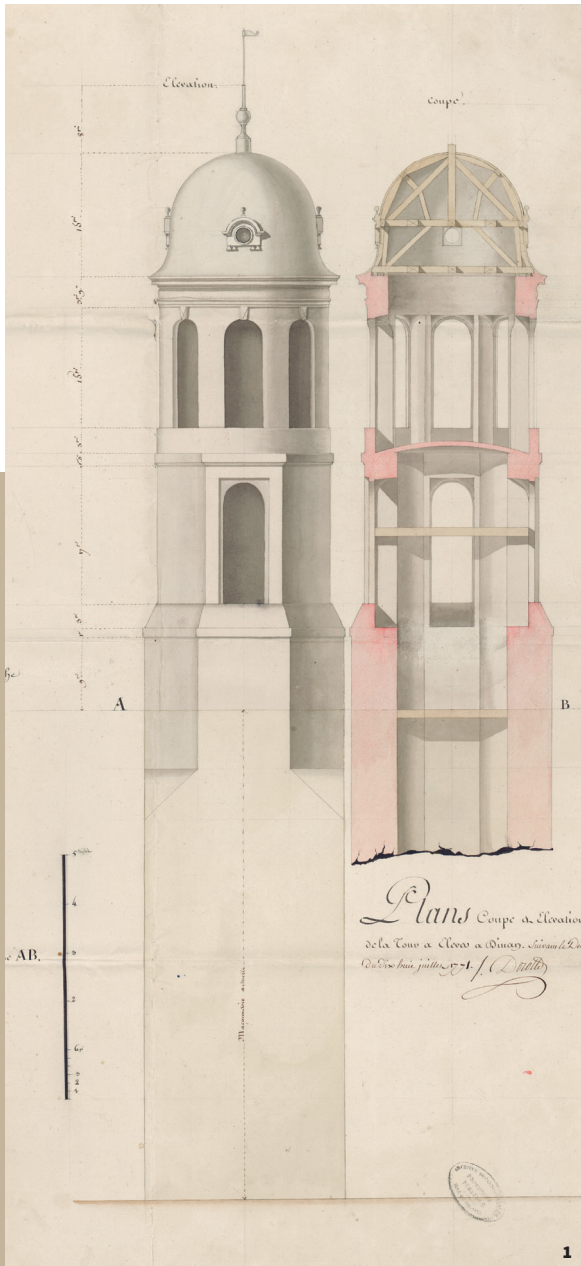
**ANNE POUR VRAY IE FVS NOVMEE  
EN L AN MIL CINQ CENT SEPT  
DES NOBLES DE LA VILLE NOVMEE  
TIERCE DE CE PAYS EN EFFET  
IE FUS EN CE TVIT AN FONDVE  
AV MOIS D'AOVST PAR PHILIPES BVFFET  
ET DE BON MESTAL BIEN RANDVE  
DV POYS DE SIX MIL ET SEPT**





For more than four centuries, the bell regulated the city but in 1906, the damaged bell had to be changed. The counsellors disagreed, some wanted the bell to join the collections of the museum, others wanted to reuse the metal to cast a new bell. It was finally melted down and the bell was recast in a Douai workshop. The former inscription as well as the coat of arms of Brittany, the Rohan family and Dinan were noted down. Two other inscriptions were also added on the new bell «I am named Duchess Ann» and «recast in the Vauthy foundry of Douai in 1906». Three additional small bells named Jacqueline, Françoise and Noguette are also at the side of the main bell of the belfry and ring every quarter of an hour.



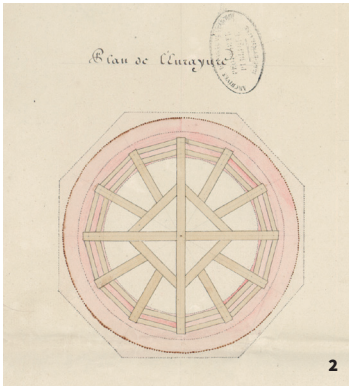


**1. Dorotte's project for a new belfry in 1771.**  
*Departmental archives of Ille et Vilaine, C490/1.*

### 1771 : A DIFFERENT CLOCK TOWER

At the beginning of 1770, the framework and the covering of the clock tower needed important repairs and for this reason, on June 14th 1771, Mr Vaugrena, mayor of Dinan, requested Mr Dorotte, an engineer working for the Brittany Estate Office, to review the monument. In August the city councilors discovered, from the size of his estimate, that Dorotte planned to substantially alter the appearance of the medieval tower.

The lowest levels were not concerned by the modifications. The engineer estimated that the stoneworks could support the foreseen alterations from the third floor. Whereas the basis of the tower has a square shape, the octagonal third level is made out of wood. The engineer Dorotte proposed to replace it by an octagonal stone level, lit by four large openings. The fourth level, called the "lantern" was much altered. Dorotte wanted to rebuild it in stone and to increase its size.



**2. Dorotte's project for a new belfry in 1771, detail of the dome. *Departmental archives of Ille et Vilaine, C490/1.***

**3. View of the «lantern» on the clock tower.**

Eight large openings would give a good view of the city and strengthen the monumentality of the whole structure. The important slate roof was replaced by a dome.

Because of its general aspect and the decorations on the monument, Dorotte's project was part of the important reconstructions plans decided by the town councillors in cities such as Nantes or Rennes. It also shows the influence of the classical architecture of the eighteenth century and the fact that Dinan was not excluded from the important artistic movements.



A committee was appointed, charged with examining the project valued at 6,400 livres of the day. After having consulted the “best carpenters, stonemasons and roofers of the city”, the committee submitted its conclusions on the 28th August 1771. The real cost of the project being more than 10,000 livres, the city council finally rejected it, and urged that «repairs should be done according to the current structure of the tower, with the same materials». Because of the lack of funds and the reluctance of the town councillors, Dorotte's project was finally abandoned. The clock tower was restored exactly as it was, thus preserving the medieval image of Dinan.

« L'HORLOGE DE LADICTE VILLE EST A  
PEU PRES SEMBLABLE A CELLE DE  
RENNES POUR CE QUI EST DE L'EDIFICE,  
MAIS LE TIMBRE N'EN PAS SI GROS ET  
TOUTESFOIS PLUS SAIN ET QUI SE FAICT  
ENTENDRE DE PLUS LOING. »

Auteur Anonyme, « Dinan en 1635 » in *Revue de Bretagne, de Vendée et d'Anjou*, tome IV, 1890.

### À proximité :

#### The Castle of Dinan

Rue du Château  
02 96 39 45 20  
chateau@dinan.fr

#### Saint-Sauveur Basilica

Place Saint-Sauveur

#### Saint-Malo Church

Grand-rue

#### Sainte-Catherine Chapel

Rue Chauffepied

#### The rampart of Dinan

### Information :

Tour de l'Horloge  
Rue de l'Horloge  
02 96 87 02 26  
dinan.fr

### Dinan, City of Art and History

is part of a national network of cities and lands of art and history since 1986. The Heritage Department is in charge of :

- informing the knowledge and development of heritage.
- protection, maintenance and restoration of local historic buildings.
- the promotion of the quality of urban and landscape architecture.
- informing local history and culture for the benefit of residents and visitors.
- organising heritage and cultural tourism.

The French state ministry of culture presents the Town of Art and History award to outstanding local authorities engaged in the protection of their local heritage. The label reflects the skill of the team working at the municipal heritage department and the quality of their work.

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**Dinan**  
*Léhon*