

# FOCUS

# THE CASTLE OF DINAN



**THROUGH  
THE CENTURIES**



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

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Photo 13

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# THROUGH THE CENTURIES

**1. From 1380, the residence tower of the castle of Dinan was built by order of Jean IV, Duke of Brittany.**

Emblem of the city of Dinan, the castle is a fascinating testimony of stone from the late Middle Ages.

## **DINAN AND THE DUKES OF BRITTANY**

In 1380, Duke Jean IV returned to Brittany after several years exile in England. Eager to display his power over his duchy, he started an extensive construction programme.

The city of Dinan was prosperous and its citizens thought they could ignore the duke. Dinan already had a city wall, the largest in Brittany, built at the end of the 13th century by the first Duke Jean with additions by his successors. Duke Jean IV then commissioned an exceptional architectural project, the tower palace.

## **THE TOWER PALACE OF THE DUKE JEAN IV**

As a show of authority in Dinan, Jean IV entrusts Etienne Le Tur with the construction of a tower or keep with a height of near 45 metres (147 ft). Probably habitable as quickly as 1384, the tower was, in effect, a princely palace.

The quality of the castle-palace decorations and the complexity of its structure was a direct challenge by the Duke to the prestige of the King of France, whose royal castle of the Bois-de-Vincennes had revived the fashion for residential towers.

Although it compressed the interior volumes, a vertical building allowed the stratification of late feudal social rank to be practically reflected in access to the successive levels of the tower.



The lower floors were reserved for the functioning of the castle such as storage and kitchen while the intermediate and upper floors were reserved for performance rooms and withdrawing or intimate rooms, with the Duke's apartments on the top floors. So, it was possible to directly assess the importance of a person according to the floor they were allowed to ascend to.

The tower originally had a main courtyard and a bailey or lower courtyard in which the necessary functions of a medieval fortress could be carried out, including a blacksmith's forge, stabling for horses and a dovecote.



**1. Modified at the end of the 16th century, the castle of Dinan becomes a formidable fortress.**

### **THE FORTRESS OF THE DUKE OF MERCOEUR**

At the end of the 16th century, major works carried out on the former residence of Duke Jean IV considerably modified the surroundings. Between 1585 and 1598, the city of Dinan fell into the hands of the Duke of Mercoeur, head of the Catholic League in Brittany. The city had a major strategic role in the north east corner of Brittany and its defences were thoroughly strengthened and modernized.

Linked to the Coetquen Tower by a tunnel or underpass (the “souterrain Mercoeur”) and isolated from the rest of the city by a wide moat and a high bastion open level, construction of which led to the disappearance of the bailey, the castle was not only for the defence of the city but also allowed the control by the garrison of the city’s inhabitants. On the night of January 31st, troops of Henri IV, King of France, overran Dinan. The hundred-strong garrison in the castle fought on for two weeks against more than 3,000 royal soldiers and allied local citizens.

### **THE FIRST ABANDONMENT**

The castle remained the residence of Dinan’s Governor until the 1630s. But its state of decay was attested in 1654 and confirmed in June 1669 by a letter from the King’s lieutenant to Minister Colbert. “Sir, I am forced to pay for the housing that I occupy in Dinan because the one in the castle is completely in ruins”.

In 1693 Siméon Garangeau, military engineer, described a building with solid walls but no doors, glazing or roof. A first restoration project, aiming to house the Governor and the Lieutenant, was proposed to the King but not agreed. As the second proposal in 1701 was not adopted either, the building was effectively abandoned.

### **THE PRISON**

The War of the Spanish Succession led to the French King’s War and Navy Boards starting a restoration programme of the castle in 1703, with the aim of making it a large detention centre for soldiers and sailors captured by the navy. It was decided to replace the old slate roof with the current terrace, giving the castle its current configuration. Throughout the 18th century, hundreds of English prisoners were gaoled in the castle towers.

It remained a military prison during the French Revolution but with a different type of prisoner. The castle became a civil prison from 1817 until 1904.

1. The castle museum opens its doors in 1908.

2. In 2019, an architectural project restored the foundations of the main courtyard, destroyed in the early 19th century.



### THE “CASTLE MUSEUM”

In 1906, the city of Dinan bought the castle from the Ministry of the Interior for 30,000 francs and started major works in the ducal tower. The aim was to transfer the “museum of archaeology and natural sciences”, then constrained in the limited space of the town hall. The museum opened in the castle two years later. For a century a heterogenous collection was presented, including many ethnographic objects collected from the towns and villages in or near the Rance river valley.

Incompatible with the restoration of the castle, also suffering from difficult conservation conditions, the museum’s collection was gradually transferred to storage between 2014 and 2018, so leaving room for an ambitious project to promote the castle.

### THE LEADING HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL SITE IN DINAN

In recent years historians and castle specialists such as Mars Déceneux in 2005 and Jean Mesqui in 2015, have considerably increased the present knowledge of the castle. Far from the folklore of “Duchess Ann’s Dungeon” or austere prison, the castle built by Jean IV, Duke of Brittany is in fact an exceptional example of the princely residences of the late 14th century.

Between 2017 and 2019, the restoration of the castle revived the glory of the rooms and main courtyard. Based on unpublished historical sources as well as on experimental archaeology, the ambitious project of restitution has returned the building to its original shape. A tour of the castle provides an immersion in the medieval society of the 14th and 15th centuries.



# VISITING THE CASTLE

**1. Adapted to the increasing power of cannon in the 15th century, the Coetquen tower was constructed between 1476-1481.**

**2. Since 2018, the Coetquen tower houses a scenography on the art of war in the 14th and 15th centuries.**



Since the 16th century alterations by the Duke of Mercoeur, the Coetquen tower is the second stronghold of the castle, after the ducal tower.

## THE COETQUEN TOWER

Built between 1476-1481, the Coetquen tower was part of a vast programme of fortifications ordered by François II, Duke of Brittany. The city walls were modernised to repel the threat from France and the increasing power of black powder cannon. Equipped with many casemates and imposing masonry, the tower bolstered the south-west corner of the ramparts.

Beyond its military role, this artillery tower has a distinctive architecture. The large windows, stone benches and beautiful chimneys show the desire to provide a minimum of comfort for the bourgeois militia on watch throughout the long evenings.



# PLAN OF THE CASTLE

- ① Ducal tower
- ② Main courtyard
- ③ Guichet Gate
- ④ Coetquen Tower
- ⑤ Upper bailey and barbican
- ⑥ Moats





**1. Built at the end of the 16th century the “Mercoeur” tunnel connects the Coetquen tower to the tower of Jean IV.**

**2. Protected by the main courtyard, the main entrance of the residence tower is framed by ostentatious decoration.**

### **THE “SOUTERRAIN MERCOEUR ”**

Created between 1585 and 1598, the underpass called the “souterrain Mercoeur” is a secure passage allowing the soldiers of the castle to move discreetly from the Coetquen tower to the ducal tower. The coarse finish of the walls reveals the work was done quickly and without aesthetic considerations, in a time of civil war when Dinan was a key stronghold in Brittany for the Catholic League.

The tunnel also typifies the mistrust towards the population of Dinan held by the duke of Mercoeur and Catholic League garrison. While the south wall is blind, the north wall, facing the city, is pierced with dozens of windows embrasures, revealing that the fortress is charged with not only defending Dinan, but also to control its population.

### **MAIN COURTYARD AND ENTRANCE TO DUCAL TOWER**

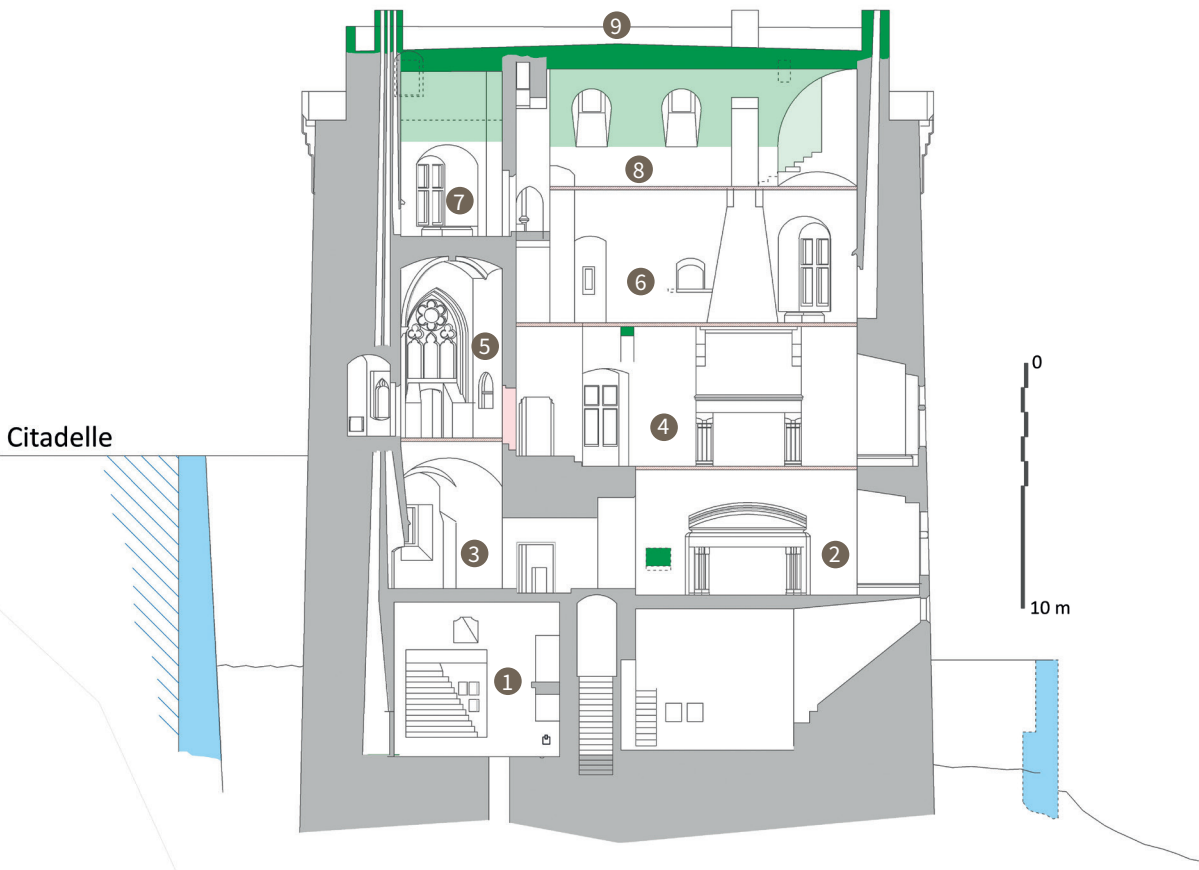
Restored in 2019, the main courtyard of the ducal tower was originally served by three drawbridges whose vestiges are still visible in the masonry. Two drawbridges faced the open country while the third, opening into the town, served a bailey. This courtyard contained outbuildings and the earlier presence of a dovecote, forge and stable is known thanks to ancient sources.

In the main courtyard a narrow opening provides the only access to a small room identified as the prison cell of the castle. Its location is no coincidence: the duke symbolically trampled on his opponents before entering the tower, a manifestation of power expressed in architecture.

The main entrance of the tower consists of a pedestrian gate capped by a large stone frame embellished with fine sculptures. Inside, a portcullis, a heavy wooden door and a murder hole ensured the safety of a long corridor, overlooking a small guards’ room and a fourth, counterbalanced, drawbridge.



# SECTIONAL DRAWING OF THE DUCAL TOWER



- ① Lower kitchen
- ② Banqueting hall
- ③ Upper kitchen
- ④ Reception room
- ⑤ Chapel

- ⑥ Withdrawing Room
- ⑦ Private apartments of Duke
- ⑧ Guards room
- ⑨ Platform



1. At the end of the 14th century medieval dishes diversified and specialized.

2. The lower kitchen was well equipped to enable the preparation of impressive quantities of food.

3. In the banqueting hall, the princely power comes into the scene.

### THE LOWER KITCHEN

Located in the basement and covered with a stone vault to prevent the spread of fire, the lower kitchen is a large room equipped with an imposing fireplace and large dresser, six cupboards built into the masonry, a well for water, and an ingenious water drainage system. A service lift connected the lower kitchen to the upper kitchen, located on the first floor.

In princely kitchens, the teams were exclusively masculine and worked under the authority of a master cook or “chef”. In 1370, king Charles V’s cook, Guillaume Tirel, better known under the nickname of Taillevent, revolutionized culinary art by publishing one of the first cookbooks, the famous “Le Viandier” collection of recipes.

Known financial accounts of Duke Jean IV state that he and his entourage stayed at Dinan Castle from 7 to 23 October 1385. The quantity and diversity of products attest to the volume of food and drink processed by these kitchens. For the single day of October 8th, the following purchases were made: 190 loaves of bread, 1,200 litres of Anjou and Gascony wine, all kinds of spices, and dozens of species of fish including hake, conger, ray, bream.





## BANQUETING HALL

Lighted by two large mullioned windows and heated by a vast fireplace decorated with carved capitals, the banqueting hall is a performance space for the ceremonies of greeting and representation essential to the staging of princely power.

The abundance of food is an important social marker, reinforced by the luxury and extravagance of some “entremets” (\*). Giant pies in the form of a castle, or swans and peacocks reconstituted with the beaks and legs gilded with gold leaf, showed the high degree of wealth enjoyed by the host.

Reopened in 2019, the service lift of the banqueting hall is another social marker. In both a physical and symbolic way, it separates the subordinate staff who brought the dishes

from the kitchens, from the personnel attached to the person of the princes, with the squire or cupbearer being the only attendants authorized to serve at table when the guests were in the banqueting hall.

Adjoining the hall, a small room with a sink recess perhaps served for bottle storage (a buttery). Finally, on the same level, the higher kitchen, where the most delicate dishes were prepared, was directly connected to the lower kitchen (presently not open to visitors).

*\* entremets : in French it literally means “between servings”. It refers to elaborate food formed into shapes. Now it refers to a type of dessert.*



### **THE RECEPTION ROOM**

Originally, a partition of wood divided the space into a small antechamber and a larger chamber reserved for official ceremonies and the exercise of power. In this place of prestige, the duke or his representative rendered justice, received tribute or undertook major political decisions.

Lighted by large mullioned windows, this vast room is especially remarkable for its monumental fireplace and protruding chimney breast, a technological achievement for the time, and its fine columns crowned with capitals decorated with oak leaves.

The reception room had little furniture except for a few ostentatious items. To express the majesty of the prince, a high-backed throne capped with an emblazoned canopy was placed on a wooden platform or dais.

**1. Reserved for official ceremonies, the reception room enables the prince to exercise his power in public.**

**2. Symbol of sovereign power, the ducal throne takes the shape of the curule seat of the Roman consuls.**

**3. Central component of the residence tower, the chapel is as notable for its intimacy as for the importance of its sculpted decorations**



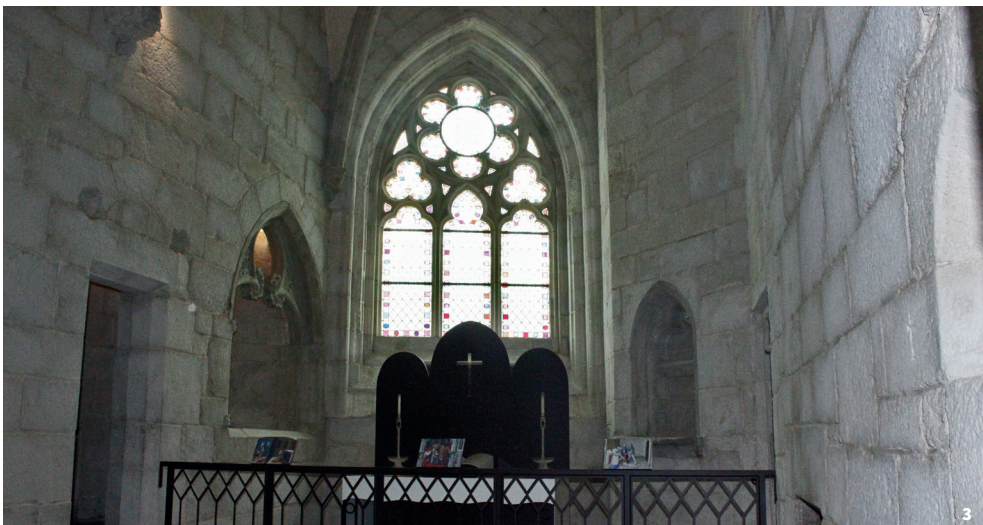
## THE CHAPEL

The chapel is the paramount place in the ducal tower. Finely carved decorations of vegetation on the brackets of the vault show the care and refinement brought to the decoration of this liturgical space. Set into the thick masonry is a cupboard for sacred vessels, a holy water basin and a liturgical piscina or sacrarium. Destroyed in 1703 when the tower was turned into prison, the altar was originally under the chevet bay, where is now the exit door.

The small size of the chapel indicates that only the Duke and his intimates could attend the religious service, presumably celebrated by one of the chaplains who accompanied the princes in their travels. The other guests had to go to Saint Sauveur parish church to attend mass.

## THE DUCAL ORATORY

Remarkable for its decoration, this small ducal seigniorial oratory is equipped with an imposing recessed seat set in the masonry. Its shape, which resembles the curule seat of the Roman consuls, is an expression of the independence of the Duke Jean IV from the French state. The oratory also has a hagnoscope, a small opening in an interior wall of a church, enabling a view on the altar, sometimes called a squint in England. It consists of delicate columns capped with a tri-lobed arch decorated with imposing crockets.





### **THE WITHDRAWING ROOM**

Set for the duke and his intimates, the large withdrawing room is lit by large mullioned windows. Like the reception room, it is likely that a thin partition would have split the volume in half, creating an antechamber for additional privacy.

In these rooms Duke Jean IV and his family could listen to music or play chess. The service lift confirms that when the duke chose not to eat in the banqueting hall, he could take a meal here.

Nearby, a small room with a fireplace and two wall cupboards provided the function of a wardrobe, where clothes, sheets, draperies and tapestries were kept.



### **THE PRIVATE APARTMENTS**

In front of the wardrobe, a small door gives access to a complex network of secondary stairs that provided discreet, independent access to the private apartments on the upper floors. It would have consisted of a lower chamber, probably the duke's bedroom, topped by an upper chamber with sole access via one of the private staircases. There may have been an additional small apartment with two adjoining rooms, completing the suite of private apartments. From 1703, because of the replacement of the roof by a terrace, the construction of the vault caused the disappearance of the upper chamber and the apartment.

These private apartments show the desire, as the 14th century due to a close, to reserve for the Duke of Brittany more intimate spaces, so as to exempt himself from a life of permanent display.

1. The withdrawing room is reserved for those close to the Duke and his family.

2. The ducal tower has a complex network of secondary staircases to serve the private apartments.

3. In ruins by the middle of the 17th century, the original roof was replaced by a terrace in 1703.

### THE UPPER FLOORS AND THE TERRACE

Originally, a large pitched roof of slate capped the ducal tower. Described as in ruins in 1693 by Garengneau, engineer to the King, a large terrace replaced these roofs and significantly modified the silhouette of the building from 1703 onwards. However, the walkway was preserved as it allowed the garrison to walk round the structure and serve all the machicolations and murder holes protecting the main gate. Supported by a set of remarkable, elegantly extended corbels, the walkway could also serve as a passageway, as shown by the small rectangular niches. Set at regular intervals, they were enclosed by small glazed windows and accommodated luminaries.

From the terrace, the view of Dinan and its heritage buildings is outstanding.



« AU-SUD ET SUD-OUEST EST LE CHASTEAU QUI EST PLUSTOST UN RÉDUIT POUR LE GOUVERNEUR, QUI EST M. DE ROSMADECK, SIEUR DE LA HUNAUDAYE, ET POUR SON LIEUTENANT, LE SIEUR DE LA SAULAYE, AVEC 15 SOLDATS ENTRETENUS, QUE POUR FORTERESSE. CAR CE N'EST QU'UNE SEULE TRÈS GROSSE TOUR ET MASSE DE PIERRE, À DOUBLE SOMMET EN POINTES COUVERTE D'ARDOISE (...) »

Dubuisson-Aubenay, 1636, *Itinéraire de Bretagne*, p.218.

#### Nearby :

##### The Clock Tower

Rue de l'Horloge  
02 96 87 02 26

##### Saint-Sauveur Basilica

Place Saint-Sauveur

##### Saint-Malo Church

Grand-rue

##### Sainte-Catherine Chapel

Rue Chauffepied

##### The rampart of Dinan

#### Information :

Dinan Cap-Fréhel Tourisme  
Tourist Office  
Rue du Château  
0 825 95 01 22  
dinan-capfrehel.com

#### Dinan, City of Art and History

is part of a national network of cities and lands of art and history since 1986. The preservation 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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