

# Mauvezin Castle

## Visitor's guide



Welcome to Mauvezin Castle. It belongs to the Escòla Gaston Febus Association, created in 1896. The Association acquired the castle in 1907, has been restoring it ever since then and keeps it open to visitors all year round.

**To guide you in your visit, you will find information panels at strategic points.**

### **1 – The video room and the Occitan language exhibition.**

**To begin your visit, climb the staircase and get seated in the room located on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the reception building.**

**Under the watchful eye of the poetess Filadelfe de Gerde (1871-1952), you will hear about the history of the castle. (10 min. video)**

Count Centulle of Bigorre built the castle in the 11<sup>th</sup> century to protect the Eastern border of Bigorre County. The first mention of the Castle dates back to March 12<sup>th</sup> 1083 and can be found on the peace treaty between Sanche of Labarthe and Countess Beatrix.

Gaston Febus acquired the Castle in 1379.

You'll see the various stages of the construction during the visit.

**In the same room, you can have a look at the Occitan language exhibition**

The Occitan language is derived from spoken Latin and was born at the same time as French. By the 10<sup>th</sup> century, it was fully formed and then spread widely in conjunction with the Troubadour movement, from which originated the first European literature. Around 1100, Occitan was influencing the whole of Romanic Europe, by introducing new values such as chivalrous or courteous love, and inspiring princes such as William IX, Duke of Aquitaine and Richard the Lionheart.

Gaston Febus, the most educated Prince of his time, was a respectable heir to these troubadours and had the main encyclopaedic works of the time translated into Occitan.

Frédéric Mistral won the Nobel Prize of Literature in 1904 for his works in the Occitan language. In spite of many setbacks, in 2010, 51 % of the population in our department still spoke or understood the mother tongue of Henry IV of France (1554-1610). Nowadays two associative schools called "Calandretas" and five state-funded bilingual schools teach it to the children.

**You should now cross the courtyard and enter the ground floor of the keep.**

### **2 - The original keep of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.**



Vestiges of the first stone keep remain in the centre of the courtyard. It was initially built on an artificial mound three metres high. It probably replaced an earlier wooden erection.

It was originally 15 to 18 metres tall and most probably had three storeys. It would have been accessed through a door located on the first floor, with the use of a ladder.

The lower room served as a prison, particularly during the Wars of Religion. An inscription was found scratched on the wall, most probably made by a Protestant prisoner: "Only God shall be adored and the Roman Antichrist cast down".

The reconstructed scene shows the preparations for the escape of two prisoners on May 7<sup>th</sup> 1552, whose story has been preserved.



### **3 - The Attributes of Justice.**



Justice comprised three levels: low justice (police fines), middle justice (criminal offences) and high justice (murders), which remained under the jurisdiction of the Count.

The culprits were rarely locked up because prisoners were expensive to guard and to feed. Justice preferred fines. There were prices for every offence: "*whoever will trespass at night into the gardens, vineyards or meadows of others without their consent or will, with a basket, a bag or a hood or with another means to take fruits away with them, will be condemned to pay 20 sols, and if it be only with their hands and without other means of collection, he will be condemned to pay 2 sols*" (Tournay local customs – 1307).

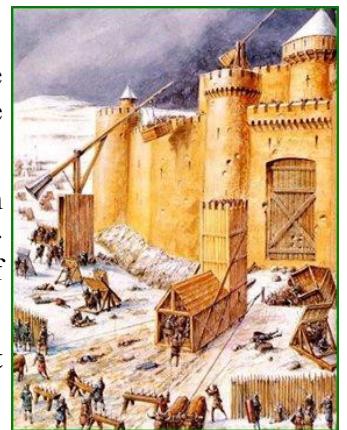
For the most serious crimes, the culprits were hanged on the gibbets located in the outer ward of the Castle. On April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1592, three people from Cieutat – 10 km from here – were hanged after a trial which cost 50 Pounds and 13 Sols.

### **4 – War machines.**

Known since antiquity, they had fallen out of use in the West during the High Middle Ages. Gaston IV "the Crusader", Viscount of Bearn, brought them back to Europe after having improved their performance during the siege of Jerusalem in 1099.

They were expensive to build and transport. Only the King of France had stores in Carcassonne for them and could have them brought for a siege. Despite how inaccurate and difficult to handle they were, they were still used long after the invention of gunpowder artillery.

1/3 scale copies are presented in the courtyard, as well as a medieval wheel crane that was used to build churches and castles.



### **5 - The vanished main building.**

In the courtyard, you'll see the remains of the main building. Probably built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, only a few elements are left: the two fireplaces on the ground floor, one on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor, four big mullioned windows, and a double mullioned one that must have brought light into a vast reception room. Against the western rampart (on your left) there could have been the bedrooms. The vestiges of two fireplaces and latrines have been identified and partially reconstructed.

**Now, you will enter the lower part of the keep. Three rooms are fitted out there.**

### **6 - The guardroom**



This scene shows what could have been the guardroom of the castle in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. A few regular soldiers paid by the Lord were sufficient to guarantee the safety of the castle under normal circumstances. Originally, the guardroom was in a lightly built, temporary building in front of the entrance gate.

On the wall, the painting illustrates Albin Bibal's donation of the Castle to the Escòla Gaston Febus in 1907.

### **7 - The low room.**

In view of its constant cool temperature, it was probably a food store. Salted or smoked meats, cereals such as wheat and rye, beans, peas, dried fruit, nuts, chestnuts and wine were stored there. In the event of some danger, food was stock-piled there for the defence of the castle.

## **8 - The bedroom.**

The scene shows a 15<sup>th</sup> century bedroom inside a fortified castle. There was little furniture and walls were covered with fabrics or tapestries. Women spent a big part of the day there.

On the wall, pictures give an overview of the pictorial art that decorated the churches of the plain and hillsides of Gascony in the Middle Ages. Religious scenes are put next to profane ones.

**Now walk across the courtyard of the castle and go up the staircase that leads to the curtain walls.**

## **9 - The wall walk along the top of the curtain walls.**

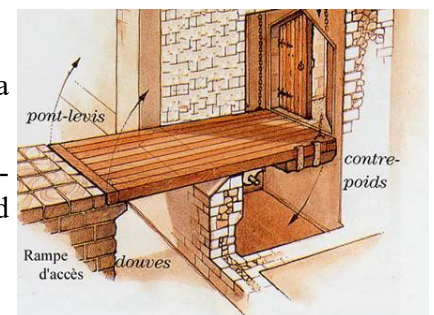
Enjoy the view of the Baronies and the Pyrenees with its Pic du Midi de Bigorre which dominates the mountain range. On the lower level, in the Arros Valley, you can see the Cistercian abbey of Escaladieu, a powerful neighbour. The orientation table will allow you to identify the points of the landscape with precision.

At the foot of the walls, there is the outer ward surrounded with a ditch and palisade. The Lord's lodging house was probably there until the construction works by Gaston Febus (1379).

## **10 - The entrance to the Castle and its defence.**

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the entrance to the Castle was across a drawbridge and a walkway whose foundation piers 7 - 8 metres high can still be seen.

It was accessed from a masonry embankment rising from the current cemetery, which we can see on Paul GELIBERT's lithograph, executed around 1835.



A hoarding was a removable wooden gallery set up at the top of the curtain walls on the outside, when a siege was expected, in order to protect the entrance gate. It would provide cover for defenders and allowed them to fire at anyone who approached the foot of the walls. We think that it may have run all around the curtain walls.

Above the entrance gate, machicolations crowning the wall provided a protected place from which stones could be dropped on the heads of attackers. The narrow gate only gave access to the keep through an offset embrasure, so that enemies could not break it open with a battering ram.

## **11 - The archaeological museum.**

The major part of the objects exposed in this room dates back to the medieval times and comes from searches made in the Castle and the outer ward. Other objects on show were discovered in the surrounding areas, and testify to the ancient activities of the region.



## **12 - The Lord's room.**

Due to the presence of the fireplace and the kitchen sink, it is identified as the main living room. It contained little furniture. During intense periods of cold, oiled parchment could act as glazing. Near the windows, seats would allow one to sit down and enjoy the daylight.

The hole into the ceiling dates back to the first restoration made by Albin Bibal in 1906. In agreement with the Chief Architect of Historic Monuments, the association has attempted to keep the original spirit of the room. The medieval floor rested on corbels that can still be seen.

## **13 - The armoury**

It was traditionally the upper room that was used for this. One can see here, in short, five centuries of military evolution.



Chain mail appeared during the 11<sup>th</sup> century and required the protection of a shield against arrows. The swords that were used, generally short ones, mainly caused fractures. Helmets protected faces but were really uncomfortable.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, there appeared at the same time as chain mail, metal plates, first in separate pieces, then assembled and articulated. Attempts were made to protect the horses in the same way, so much so, that the horse and rider with its equipment weighing more than 50 kg, resembled a tank. Formidable in open country, but becoming highly vulnerable in woody or hilly terrain.

#### **14 - The attic.**

At the top of the staircase, you will reach the attic that is open onto the crenellations, arrow slits and machicolations. The roof of the keep was reconstituted recently.

It may have served as a circular look-out point and almost certainly the equipment for defence was stored there (projectiles, bundles of arrows or crossbow bolts, stones).

It could also be used for the preservation of dry foodstuffs such as cereals.

Here there is also an exhibition on Gaston Febus (1331-1391). He acquired Castle in 1379.



**You can now go back down to the courtyard and visit the reception building.**

#### **15 - The Library.**

The castle houses the Escòla Gaston Febus library, established in 1896. It includes more than 2,000 works in French, English, Spanish, Catalan and other Occitan dialects. Certain works are very rare today. The works are partially digitised and can be found on the website of the Castle: [www.chateaudemauvezin.fr](http://www.chateaudemauvezin.fr)

A collection of musical instruments from the Middle Ages is presented.

**A video recaps the various stages of the restoration of the castle (4 min).**

#### **16 - The shop.**



For your pleasure, a shop is at your disposal.

Please remember to drop off this visitor's guide at the shop.

The staff will be happy to answer all your questions on the Castle and its history. Do not hesitate to ask them.

#### **17 - As you are leaving, above the entrance, you can admire the sculpture of the heraldic coat of arms of Jean de Foix-Grailly.**

It is one of the rare heraldic coats of arms preserved in our region.

Jean de Grailly put it there around 1425. It shows the coat of arms of Foix & Bearn county held by a chimaera (fire-breathing monster, with a lion's head, a goat's body, and a serpent's tail), crowned with the Bearn cow's head helm and the two yellow and red vertical bands of Foix. It carries the motto, « J'ay belle dame » (I have a beautiful lady).



**Mercés plan dera vòsta visita. Adishatz !**  
(Thank you very much for coming. Goodbye!)

**In summer, music, traditional dances and medieval entertainment every Sunday and holidays.**

**For more information about the programme of the events:**