

Glossary

Albigensians: the name given to the Cathars in southern France.

Arrow loops: a vertical slit made for shooting arrows.

Cathar: meaning “pure” in Greek. Religious people who believe in a good world, made by God, opposed to a world of evil. The Cathars preached austerity.

List: the space between two enclosures

Machicolation: a stone overhanging gallery with openings in the floor for missiles to be shot downwards.

Portcullis: an iron or wooden grid sliding downwards to close off a passageway.

Practical information

Castle tour with wall-walk takes on average: 1 hour

Tour of the walls takes on average: 45 minutes
Guided tours. Lecture tours.

Audio-guide tours

Tours suitable for disabled visitors.

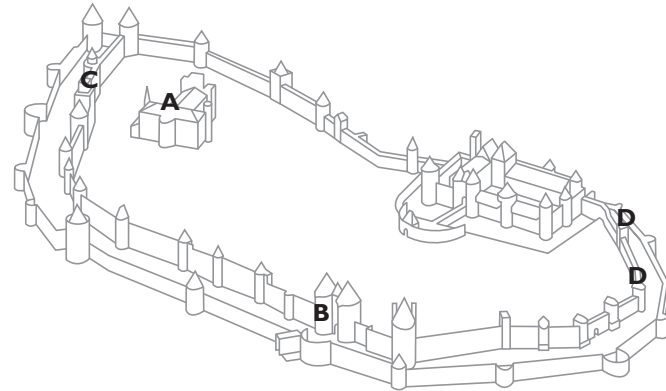


The Centre des monuments nationaux publishes a collection of guidebooks about French monuments, translated into several languages. Éditions du patrimoine publications are on sale in the bookshop-giftshop.

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crédits photos Ph. Berté © Centre des monuments nationaux, Paris. Illustrations François Bresse. Tour pour paille, conception Plein Sens, Anders, réalisation beau fixe, traduction Caracènes et cetera. Impression Néo-Typo, avril 2008.



Eugène Viollet-le-Duc and the restoration of the city

The damaged city

In 1659, the Roussillon region became part of France, marking the decline of the city of Carcassonne. The bourgeois went to live in the lower town. In the early 19th century, the military garrison on the site found it difficult to maintain the fortifications.

The walls were used as stone quarries and fell into ruin.

A wake-up call

The learned gentry of Carcassonne, including Jean-Pierre Cros-Mayrevieille, moved into action and in 1835 they gained the support of Prosper Mérimée, the inspector of historic monuments.

In 1844, the architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc was put in charge of restoring the Saint-Nazaire and Saint-Celse basilica (A). He subsequently undertook a complete study of the fortifications which was used as the basis for their restoration.

For the next 50 years and more, the city of Carcassonne, identified as the finest example of medieval military architecture, became one of the biggest restoration sites in Europe.

Viollet-le-Duc's concept of restoration

In 1853, Viollet-le-Duc proposed a first restoration project, which was the basis of work from 1853 to 1862, on the inner part of the enclosure and the Porte Narbonnaise (B). He made realistic and affordable proposals, with nine roofless towers.

In 1862, Viollet-le-Duc applied for a second project moving on from the pragmatism of the first one and aiming for full restoration. The Porte Saint-Nazaire (C) was one site involved. Between Viollet-le-Duc's death in 1879 and 1910, the architect Paul Boeswillwald completed the restoration campaign. He continued to rid the walls of extraneous buildings: a total of 112 houses in the lists* were expropriated and destroyed.

Roofing

Viollet-le-Duc covered the pointed roofs with lauze, the local slate. In the 1960s, attempts were made to diversify the appearance of the city to reflect various shapes from different periods of history, with the reintroduction of flat, tiled roofs on the Gallo-Roman towers (D). The uniform aspect of the original restoration was thus lost.

* Explanations overleaf.

City of Carcassonne

Exemplary restoration

2 500 years of history

Inhabited from ancient times, the site was protected at the time of the Lower Empire by a Gallo-Roman enclosure. This did not however prevent Visigoth, Saracen and Frankish assailants from each taking possession of it in turn.

From independence to annexation

The Middle Ages were dominated by the powerful Trencavel dynasty. The city played an important role in the South of France in the 12th century. The Cathar religion became very influential, and in 1208 Pope Innocent III called for a crusade against the Albigensians*. Carcassonne was besieged and surrendered.

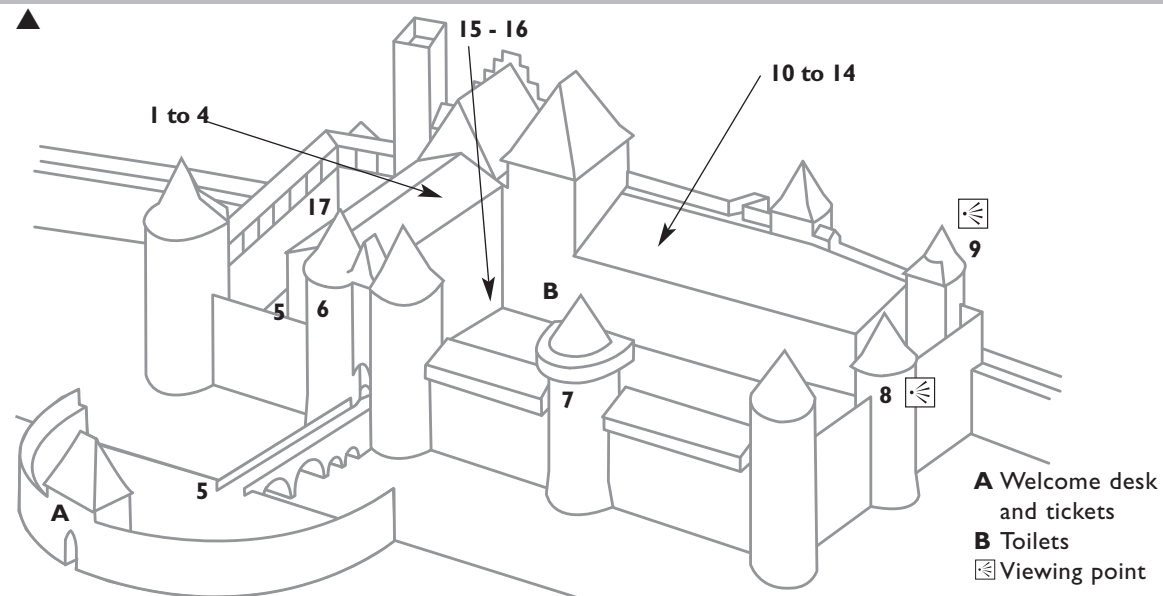


Annexed to the royal domain in 1226, the town became the fortified site that can still be seen today.

Rediscovery and restoration

Before the signature of the Treaty of the Pyrenees in 1659, Carcassonne protected the border between France and Aragon. In the 19th century, the architect Viollet-le-Duc restored the city and its mediaeval look. It was listed as a UNESCO world heritage site in 1997.

* Explanations overleaf.



Exemplary architecture

- 1** Eugène Viollet-le-Duc greets visitors with two gargoyles, copies which were intended for the Saint-Nazaire basilica, and a view of the city.
- 2** Carcassonne, a model of mediaeval military architecture, was one of the greatest restoration sites in 19th-century Europe. The original 4th-century enclosure was still protecting the city during the siege of 1209. From 1226, the city was fortified by a second enclosure, which was modernised at the end of the 13th century by the kings of France.
- 3** The two enclosures meet at the late-13th-century square Bishop's Tower, which stretches across them and controls movement in the lists*. Close by, the Porte d'Aude is one of the four ways into the city.
- 4** The basilica of Saint Nazaire and Saint Celse was Carcassonne cathedral until 1801. The bishop's palace, the see of spiritual power in the city, stood next to it.

The medieval defences

- 5** The barbican, with its crenellated walls, was the first obstacle met by assailants who then had to cross the open space within reach of the castle's crossbowmen. This space also enabled the defenders to muster their troops.
The bridge had a mobile section. During the life of these defences, the castle was never taken.
- 6** The entrance gate to the city was heavily defend-ed: two portcullises* were commanded from the control rooms located on different levels to provide protection from any possible treachery on the part of the soldiers. The mechanism of the first portcullis* passed through a hole in the floor and was also used as a machicolation*. The arrow loops* in the towers were used for bows or cross-bows.
- 7** The hoarding is a wooden gallery at the top, overhanging the wall, to strengthen the defence system in times of siege. It was possible to shoot vertically downwards from it. Hoardings, which were widely used in the 12th and 13th centuries, were replaced by stone machicolations which are in less danger from fire.

- 8** The inner wall. This section still includes several 4th-century Roman towers. They have a distinctive U shape, rounded on the outside, and feature brick courses. During the siege of the city in 1209, only this enclosure existed.
- 9** The Aude barbican, on the site of Saint-Gimer church (1859), was a major element in the defence of the castle. Joined to the latter by a passageway protected by high walls that still stand today, it guarded the access to the river.

Founding a “museum”

- 10** Since 1927 the medieval rooms, which have been altered at different times in order to house military garrisons, have been home to a collection of sculptures from buildings in Carcassonne and the outlying area.
- 11** Alabaster objects from the early 15th century illustrate three episodes from the Passion of Christ. They come from a reredos in a church in the destroyed city. The 14th-century *Smiling Madonna* is probably the work of an artist from Sienna in Italy.
- 12** The lower town called “bastide Saint-Louis” was founded during the siege in 1240: Raymond Roger Trencavel aided by the inhabitants failed in his attempt to recapture the city from the seneschal of the king of France. The royal forces burned the outlying district and Louis IX (Saint Louis) only gave permission for it to be rebuilt seven years later, on the other side of the river.
In the early 14th century, the new city became one of the large textile centres in the Languedoc region.
- 13** The keep of the Viscounts Trencavel. The paintings illustrate the fighting between Frankish knights and Saracens and the crusades to the Holy Land in which the Trencavels took part in the 12th century.

- 14** In the Roman era, Carcassonne was a prosperous place thanks to its location on the trade route between Toulouse and Narbonne, before the construction of the first enclosure in the 4th century to protect it against barbarian invasions.

Changes to the castle

- 15-16** The Trencavels' first castle, in the early 12th century, was built on the Roman wall. The chapel was built and at the end of the century the perpendicular wing was added. Before the troubled years of the crusades against the Cathars, the defences were strengthened with crenellations and the watch tower was raised. In 1226, Carcassonne was annexed to the domain of the king of France and the enclosure wall and barbican were built close to the city partly to provide protection from the populace.
In the 13th and 14th centuries, the fortress was transformed into a lordly residence: buildings were built in the southern courtyard and the residences were raised.
The keep: Above the twin windows, in the wall cladding, the marks of the old crenellations show the height of the fortifications at the beginning of the 13th century. Lower down, there are holes to drain away rainwater.
- 17** In the southern courtyard the ground and walls still bear remains showing the size of the state room of the seneschals of the king of France, added in the 13th or 14th century.
- 18** The site of the chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary in the 12th-century castle can be seen on the ground.
- 19** The drawings by Viollet-le-Duc are an idealised reconstruction of a late 13th-century city: this is the rear of the castle enclosure and the south wing.