

# The fortified castle of Guise



For your own security and comfort we ask you to :

**Respect the signage on the circuit**

**Do not proceed beyond the guardrail**

**Do not climb on the embankments**

**Keep an eye on your children**

## 1 One thousand years of history

It is at the medieval castle, which is dominated by the keep, that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the dukes of Guise allowed the construction of one of Northern Europe's biggest bastions, which would later attract the attention of Vauban. After the shellfire during the First World War the castle could have disappeared as a waste disposal site. In 1952 Maurice Duton founded the « Club du Vieux Manoir » that makes it possible for young people to get involved in the renovation and preservation processes that brought the site back to life. Since its foundation the non-profit « Club du Vieux Manoir » has hosted more than 55 000 young people in Guise.

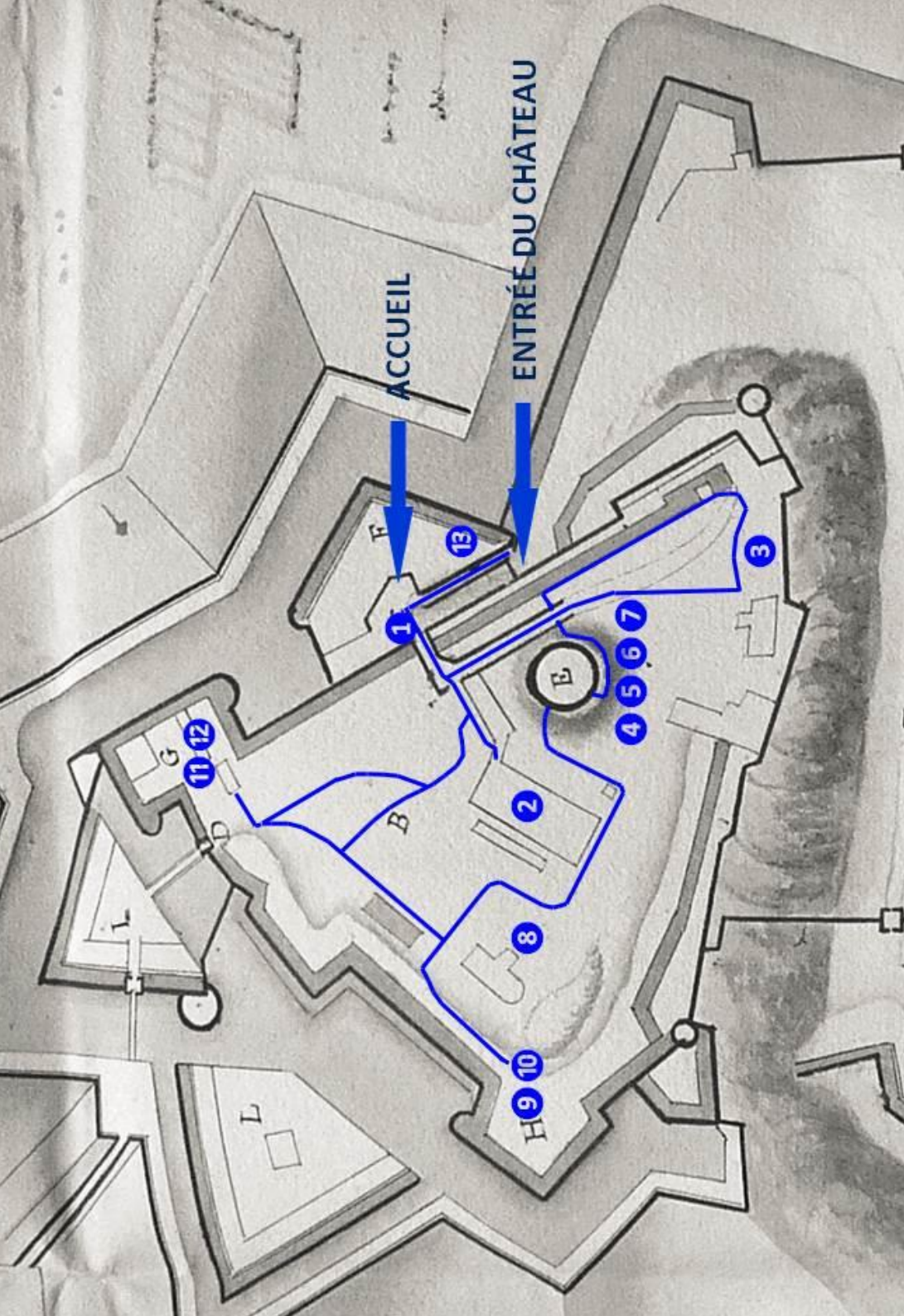
## 2 The arsenal also known as « the building of the 3000 » (16<sup>th</sup> century)

It is believed that this building which consisted of seven floors could host more than 3 000 people during a siege. Used as an arsenal at first, it also served other purposes such as the storage of grains and materials or as barracks... The cellar in the basement measured 600 m<sup>2</sup> and was used to safely store first gunpowder and then food, the latter of which hung on hooks from the vaults to protect it from the rats. It took the young people from the « Club du Vieux Manoir » five years to clear the cellar out. The roof which consisted of four floors has disappeared and two more floors are still buried.

## 3 The cavalier, lookout point towards the town

You are on the ancient rampart of the castle which was blown up in 1957 due to a danger of collapsing. The site overlooks the valley of the Oise and had been used to watch the surrounding area for a long time, especially the border with the Spanish Netherlands in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Today it offers a panorama of the town, of the development of its architecture and urban sprawl: at the foot of the hill are the ancient houses and the « Rue Camille Desmoulins » (named after the famous revolutionary who was born here), up north is the « Familistère » and Godin's factories and in the distance you will see the contemporary quarters.



#### **4 The keep (12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century)**

The keep is the main tower of the castle and its most ancient section. It symbolizes power and was the home of the lord and the last refuge in case of a siege. It has indeed endured multiple sieges. Its circular shape makes it more resistant than square towers whose corners are their weak points. It was built from strong sandstones from the Ardennes. At the base, the walls are almost six metres thick, at the top almost five metres. The defensive arrow slits are facing the town and the main gate since these were the most vulnerable sides.

#### **5 The keep, the lord's chamber (12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century)**

This room constitutes the living space for the lord and his family. Here you find an imposing fireplace and a well. The room was divided into two sections in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Thick wooden beams were embedded into holes in the wall, that you can still recognize today, and carried a wooden floor on top of them. Stairs led to the chapel « Saint Nicolas » where you find the ribbed vault. A deadfall trap is situated above the ancient bricked entrance door which was visible from the outside. It was used to throw projectiles down on the invaders from the kitchen.

#### **6 The keep, the kitchen (12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century)**

Here you will notice the flue of a big fireplace, which lost a part of its hood, and a baking oven that can be seen on the inside. To your right you'll find a 90 metres deep well that is filled in nowadays. It runs through all the three floors and served as a serving hatch as well. Also noticeable is the development of the arrow slits: the openings for the archers who defended the well outside and who should prevent the water from getting poisoned, the openings for the crossbowmen just opposite and finally the bigger openings for a cannon and a culverine that can be traced back to the development of the artillery.

#### **7 The keep, the cellar (12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century)**

In the Middle Ages this room served as a cellar and as a shelter during a siege. It was transformed into an gunpowder magazine in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. During this time the level of the floor was raised and a door leading to the outside and ventilation shafts were built in. Its present materials are modern.

#### **8 The collegiate church « Saint-Gervais Saint-Prothais » (12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century)**

As old as the keep, it was built after a chapel. Used as an ammunition storage during the Revolution, it was then destroyed in 1801. The masonry on the ground are not the foundations of the building. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the ground was actually 4 metres deeper. Its remains were discovered in 1964 when the « Club du Vieux Manoir » began its archaeological work to prevent the castle from destruction. Parts of the findings are displayed in the museum.

#### **9 The "Bastion de la Charbonnière", the hall of 40 men (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century)**

This casemate stands inside one of the castle's bastions and sheltered two cannons which were each operated by 20 men. The thick black smoke that formed during

firing could escape through two ventilation shafts in the vault. One of the openings for the cannons was replaced by two smaller openings for gunmen in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **10 The "Bastion de la Charbonnière", « the dungeon » (17<sup>th</sup> century)**

Contrary to appearances (and its nickname) this room was not designed to be a dungeon. It is actually a casemate that was used to defend the fortification walls from further below. Inside there is a shooting opening and outside just above the gate you will see a ventilation shaft. However, no evidence suggests that it could not have been used as a dungeon if needed.

#### **11 The « Bastion de l'Alouette », historical and archaeological museum (16<sup>th</sup> century)**

The museum presents the thousand years old history of the site from the Middle Ages to the Great War. The objects of everyday life as well as the military objects were retrieved by the young volunteers of the « Club du Vieux Manoir » during their excavations.

#### **12 The « Bastion de l'Alouette », the defence galleries (16<sup>th</sup> century)**

These underground galleries run along the bastion's sides. They allow for covered movements towards the combat zones and served primarily to listen intensely. One dreaded an attack consisting of digging tunnels towards the fortification wall and using mines to try and destroy it. As soon as these galleries were detected, counterattacks were launched from the castle's own countermines to try and make the ennemy's tunnels collapse before they reached the fortifications.

#### **13 The « Bastion de la Haute Ville », the so-called gallery of the lepers (16<sup>th</sup> century)**

This gallery was built around the year 1540 and was designed by the Italian engineer Girolamo Bellarmato. It's the result of one hundred years of research in military architecture and brings the castle's defence to perfection. Just like the other galleries, it guaranteed the secure passage of the garnison, served to listen and allowed for attacking the enemy from behind. 120 meters long, the gallery has 24 identical defence points, each of which disposes of a shooting opening, of slits for listening and of a ventilation shaft. The latter was essential to get rid of the thick smoke from the fired weapons and to lessen the blast from the explosion of a mine.

A modern legend has it that the barred holes in the ground were used to imprison lepers in order to scare off the attackers...

**The self-guided tour is currently in the trial period. Therefore, this brochure is being improved constantly. Please don't hesitate to ask us for any additional informations...**