

2023

DU 1^{er} avril
AU 1^{er} oct.

Ainay-le-Vieil A VILLAGE AND ITS CASTLE

BEFORE THE 1914 WAR

photographs from the family archives

NOUVELLES
**RENAIS
SANCE(S)** !
EN CENTRE-VAL DE LOIRE
2023
FRANCE

www.chateau-ainaylevieil.fr



A sentence often comes up in the mouths of children or adults: «What was it like before? This question, full of curiosity, excitement and sometimes nostalgia, shows how important it is to pass on what we know about the history of places and people that are dear to us when they provide knowledge of ways of life and savoir-faire that have now disappeared.

A place like the village of Ainay-le-Vieil and its castle, beyond its geographical existence, has a long history. The alders that grew there gave it its name. To safeguard their kingdom, the kings of France asked their loyal lords to build fortresses to protect what belonged to them. Thus, on the site of a Gallo-Roman villa, a castle was built, the Château d'Ainay-le-Vieil. It evolved over time and, from a fortress, became a family castle passed down from generation to generation since 1467.

Thanks to the written and photographic evidence preserved in the family, the current owners of the castle, descendants of the Bigny family, are pleased to present the exhibition: «Ainay-le-Vieil: a village and its castle before the 1914 war».

The visitor will be immersed in the memory of this place thanks to photos taken by the great-grandmother of the owners, Marie de Colbert née Villefranche Bigny. They show daily life: the wedding preceded by bagpipers in the courtyard of the castle, the introduction of the first carriage... The account of Pierre Porcher, former steward, collected and transcribed in notebooks by Jeanne d'Aligny,

Marie de Colbert's daughter and grandmother of the owners, is a precious testimony to the transformations brought about by the restoration work on the castle.

These photos also show the love that Marie de Colbert had for her château, which she photographed from every angle. Here again, a love that she was able to pass on to her daughter.

This journey through time will be completed by the vision of clothes, objects and family souvenirs preciously preserved for several generations.

From the Museum of Popular Art and Traditions, visitors can continue their visit in the gardens and courtyard of the castle and enjoy comparing three key moments in the castle's recent history: the state before 1850, the restorations of the mid-19th century and the restoration work currently underway.

The owners, convinced that the past helps to build the present, wish to pass on these family memories in order to answer the questions of current and future generations, so that this heritage remains alive.



MARIE DE COLBERT BORN VILLEFRANCHE BIGNY

As she was an only child, her father, a very remarkable man and captain, had trained her in the management of the estate's lands. She herself, having a very open mind, had discovered a passion for photography. It is to her that we owe the pictures in this exhibition showing the daily life of the Château d'Ainay with family, friends, people from the village and ... her friends the dogs.



PERSPECTIVE OF THE CANALS OF THE «CARRÉ EN L'ÎLE» TOWARDS THE CASTLE

The Renaissance carré en l'île is an artificially created island surrounded by canals. In the middle of the 19th century, when the park and castle were restored, a vegetable garden of more than one hectare was planted with vegetables, boxwood and cut flowers. All around the canals, open-air fruit trees were planted: cherry, plum, apple and pear trees.

Parallel to the canals, an uninterrupted line of apple trees in double rows constitutes a real conservatory of old varieties of apples, now extinct.



THE MILLRACE

Houses were built along the millrace, including the Domaine de la Porte, which incorporates the former Priory. With its large body of water, the millrace feeds the mill, whose wheel, as it turns, transmits its movement to the millstone which produces the flour obtained from the cereals brought by the farmers.

It remained in operation until the death of the last miller, Mr Delhomme, in the 1950s, when no one wanted to take over the business.



THE MILL REACH

The mill's reach illustrates the remarkable use of water along its entire course in the castle grounds. It was used around the Carré en l'île for watering the gardens, for defence in the moat surrounding the castle and again to turn the mill, and then continued its course to the Cher.



THE OLD PRIORY

This priory was home to a few monks who were dependent on a larger abbey. The vocation of the house as a Priory is symbolised by a ciborium carved on a stone on the façade. It is situated on the edge of the mill and watchtower.

This photographic drawing was made by Luce de Bigny before the castle was restored - they are an interesting testimony to the state of the place before 1850.



THE ORANGERY AND GREENHOUSE BUILT IN THE 19TH CENTURY

The greenhouse, built against a wall and made entirely of glass, was mainly used for sowing and potting young plants. The orangery, built facing south, was intended to shelter plants and vegetation that were afraid of frost during the winter, and was therefore heated during that season. Its high ceiling allowed for the placement of large trees or shrubs that were sensitive to frost. They became indispensable when the vegetable garden and the chartreuses were recreated in the 19th century and were used until the death of Jean Amizet, the gardener in the 1960s.



AINAY CASTLE SINCE 1914

The fortress resisted the attacks of the Hundred Years' War and the countless blows of time. Inhabited by the Bigny family and their descendants since 1467, it has become a family castle that has adapted to the needs of successive generations and to the evolution of life. It is loved and maintained at great expense with the aim of keeping it alive and passing it on.



THE CHÂTELET AND THE ENCLOSURE

In the 13th century, the Sires Des Barres built this imposing and important fortress on the site of older fortifications. Faced with the English, it had to withstand numerous sieges but was never taken or dismantled. This fortified enclosure is a fine example of the «Capetian» architecture established under the reign of Philippe-Auguste, with some particularities specific to the Bourbonnais region, since the seigneurie depended on the Sires of Bourbon. It is octagonal, irregular, flanked by seven cylindrical towers with archways and equipped with a two-towered gatehouse.



THE SWAN HUT AT THE MOAT

Several swans frolic in the moat. They have a double role: to animate the moat elegantly and to clean the water by eating the algae; unfortunately they also feed on the grass consolidating the banks which they damage. This pretty swan hut still exists, it is in the first chartreuse among the flowers.



THE GRAINETIÈRE PAVILION

During the Renaissance, this pavilion, built on the site of a tower forming part of the second enclosure of the fortress of Ainay-le-Vieil, marked the entrance to the gardens and was intended for the gardeners. This use lasted until the 1960s, as Jean Amizet, the gardener, kept his seeds for the vegetable garden on the first floor. The ground floor was dedicated to the laundry room where every Friday Virginie Chabaud came to wash the castle's clothes. Nowadays, this small room is regularly used by young schoolchildren in green classes.



PICKING IN THE PARK

A little girl is walking with her dog in the park in front of the castle to pick flowers. She is near the pond of the Grainetière pavilion, which was created from the canals bringing water to the mill and corresponds to a 19th century romantic taste for landscaped parks. In the distance, the Renaissance pavilion and its aviary containing a collection of exotic birds.



ORGANISATION AND OMNIPRESENCE OF WATER IN THE CASTLE GROUNDS

The ancients had great knowledge and respect for the use of water. Water plays an essential role in the castle grounds, where it is omnipresent. The remarkable and very elaborate hydraulic system inherited from the Middle Ages is still in use; weirs and shovels regulate the flow of water along its entire course, bringing it to the Cher after it has fed the mill and the village washhouse.



THE RENAISSANCE PORCH

The Renaissance porch with its two lanterns gives access to the Capitainerie. From its perspective, one can see the Pavillon de La Volière and a weir bringing water from the canals to the mill; this water passes under a small arch cut in the wall and crosses a watchtower before feeding the millstream. The village road did not yet exist.

This photographic drawing was made by Luce de Bigny before the castle was restored - they are an interesting testimony to the state of the place before 1850.



AND THE RENAISSANCE ARRIVED

This façade of the castle illustrates this perfectly. The times were calmer, doors and windows were pierced through the thickness of the ramparts, opening up to the outside world and letting light and sunshine into the newly decorated interiors with sumptuous fireplaces and beautiful decorations. A new art of living appeared with a gentle way of life.



THE FORTRESS IN MEDIEVAL TIMES

At Ainay, a plain castle, the fortified complex covered several hectares to multiply the obstacles and delay the assault; it included «high walls, double ditches, two drawbridges». An outer enclosure about 250 paces from the castle put it beyond the reach of the artillery of the time. This enclosure was itself defended by a series of works: towers, barbican, châteleet.



THE PARK AND GARDENS

At the same time as the castle was being restored, the Marquis de Bigny redesigned and replanted the park and gardens. At the foot of the ramparts, beautiful trees were planted, including a magnificent bald cypress in front of the castle. A pathway allowed you to walk along the moat that had defended the castle for centuries.



DEPARTURE FOR A WALK

The Marquis de Malestroit drives the little wicker basket for a walk in the park. This small, light carriage was very popular and easy to drive; one still exists in the grounds of the Château d'Ainay-le-Vieil.



A SUPERB VINTAGE CAR

The Marquis de Malestroit will take his two passengers, the Countess de Villefranche-Bigny and a friend, for a ride in this beautiful old car: De Dion-Bouton or Delahaye? One and then the other followed each other in Ainay. The driver waits to start the engine with the crank.



CHATTING ON THE BRIDGE OF THE CASTLE

The Countess de Villefranche-Bigny and two friends chatting quietly on the bridge. It is interesting to note that from Jeanne de Villefranche-Bigny, who died in 1915, the Château d'Ainay was passed on by women. She passed it on to her daughter, the Marquise de Colbert, who passed it on to her daughter, the Baroness Géraud d'Aligny, who passed it on to the SCI Château d'Ainay-le-Vieil, who passed it on to Arielle Borne, who will one day pass it on... to her sons!



IMPORTANCE OF MOATS IN THE DEFENCE OF A FORTRESS

Moats were wide, water-filled ditches that were more than a man's height deep. They constituted a real obstacle to enemy attacks because access to the surrounding walls was impossible for siege engines.



THE CHÂTELET

View of the inner courtyard of the castle with its defence system, the gate and portcullis, the former prison and the two guardhouses.

This photographic drawing was made by Luce de Bigny before the castle was restored - they are an interesting testimony to the state of the place before 1850.



SOPHISTICATION OF THE DEFENCE OF THE CHÂTELET

The châtelet is the only existing access to the interior of the fortress. It was essential that it had strong defences, so it was protected by the drawbridge, the portcullis, numerous loopholes and the stunners through which the soldiers threw stones, boiling water and buckets of lime at the attackers, not to mention the buckets of... shit... from which came the widely used expression «to piss off the world».



THE CASTLE COURTYARD

When the castle was restored in the mid-19th century, stone slabs and paving stones were removed and a large amount of soil was added to allow for the planting of trees and flower beds. This photograph shows the ramparts partly hidden by trees of different species growing freely. A linden mall is planted between the Linden Tower and the Smokehouse Tower.



THE GUARDIANS' HOUSE

In the courtyard of the castle, the now defunct house of the castle guardians, the Bessons, is attached to the ramparts between the lime tower and the spruce tower.

This photographic drawing was made by Luce de Bigny before the castle was restored - they are an interesting testimony to the state of the place before 1850.



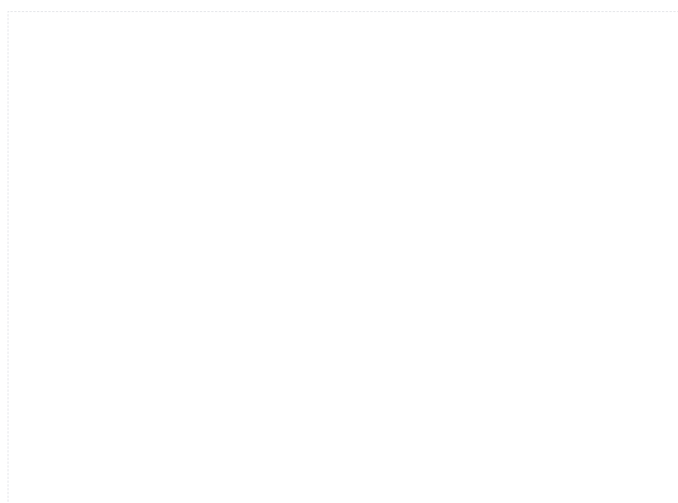
FAMILY SCENE

Enjoying the sunshine, family and friends are sitting in the courtyard of the castle chatting. Marie de Colbert teaches her dog Yamilé to be beautiful, under the amused gaze of her mother, Countess Edmond de Villefranche, and their friends.



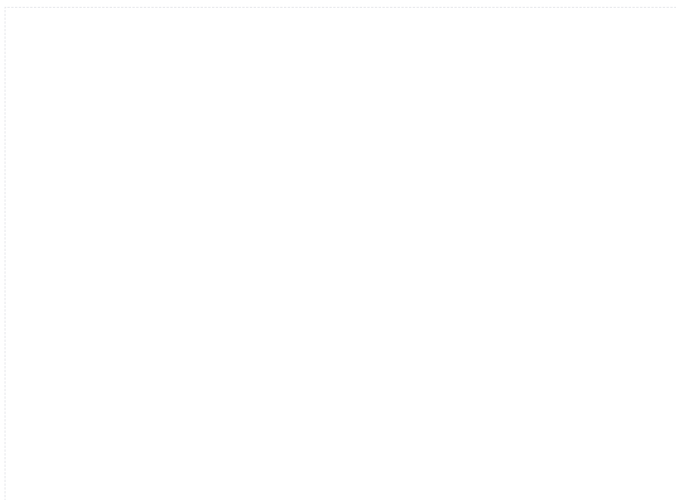
PARADE OF THE WEDDING PROCESSION

The wedding procession of people from the village preceded by two bagpipers marches through the courtyard of the castle. In Berry, the bagpipes were also called «musette» and at that time, there was a hurdy-gurdy player, Alfred Lampérière, and an accordionist, Jean-Baptiste Fourdachon, who made the whole village dance at each festival.



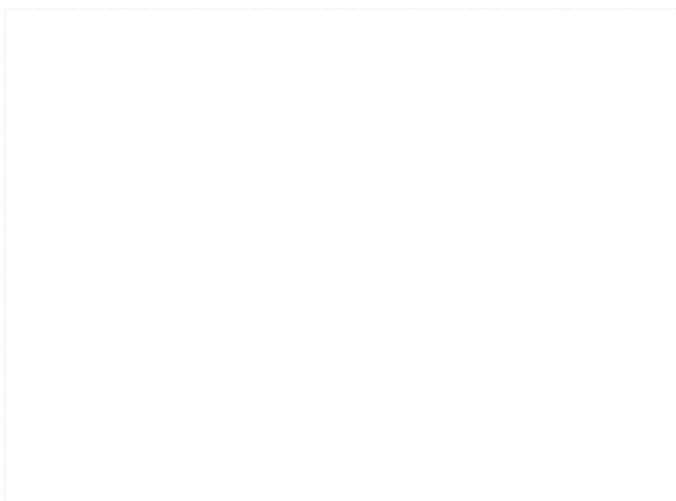
THE DRESSES

These dresses were worn by Marie de Colbert as a child and as an adult and have never left the castle, carefully preserved by the family from generation to generation.



THE CAGE

Marie de Colbert was passionate about exotic birds and collected rare specimens in the Pavillon de la Volière. This cage symbolises this passion.



THE ENGLISH WICKER CARRIAGE

This wicker carriage drove Marie de Colbert and her daughter Jeanne d'Aligny on several occasions during walks in the park. It has just been restored according to its original plans by Didier Giraud, saddler in Saint-Amand-Montrond.

Friends visitors who read us, you participate in this, be thanked.