

CHATEAU DE LAVAUGUYON

The village of Lavauguyon possesses a medieval castle, albeit in ruins, but still an impressive sight. At close of day with an owl "shooshing" at you from the ivy-clad, broken and distorted ramparts, the chateau still has power to intimidate!

There has been a fortress on this site, dominating the valley of the Tardoire, since the 11th century. At that time it belonged to the Malessac family, originally from Poitou. However, the present ruins date from 1489 when the castle was re-built by Gauthier Perusse des Cars. The chateau was abandoned during the 18th century and was dismantled during the 1789 revolution, the stone being used for local housing!

By order of 28th December 1793, the representative of the people in the departments of Haute-Vienne and La Vienne "...because of fanatical attempts" by the aristocracy to restore the ancien regime, considers it "essential to destroy 'les anciens chateaux' – all towers, parapets, ditches, drawbridges to be demolished.....and all citizens with buildings in need of urgent repairs to take whatever materials are required"!

The site's military history includes an attack on the fort in 1381 by French forces to drive out a smaller English group of defenders! (English forces occupied a good number of castles in the region during the 14th century.)

The castle, post 15th century, was a formidable fortress. The main outline was quadrilateral with each side being 40 metres in length, flanked by four round towers. The keep, facing north, had the only entrance. A substantial moat protected the walls, and an outer wall, including possibly at the point where the nearby row of houses stand, protected the moat.

Inside the walls, there were sophisticated living quarters fit for a wealthy aristocratic family.

By the 17th century, the family of Stuer de Caussade de Lavauguyon, by marriage, had inherited the castle (and the title).

Antoine de Quelan de Lavauguyon, Marshal under Louis XV, distinguished himself on several battlefields during the War of Austrian Succession.

His son, Paul Francois de Lavauguyon (1746-1828) who was ambassador to Holland then Spain, was forced to flee to England during the Revolution but re-entered France in 1805 to continue his political life.

Paul Yves Bernard de Quelen Stuer de Caussade, Duc de Lavauguyon, Prince de Carency (1778-1837) served under Napoleon and became Lieutenant General of France in 1816.

Recently, an association, Les Amis du Site du Chateau de Lavauguyon, formed to safeguard the future condition of the chateau, purchased the chateau from a private owner. The Association's President d'honneur, M. Jacques Dubois de Lavauguyon, is a direct descendant of the aristocratic family which once owned the castle.

The Association is on the look out for more volunteers and for finances to safeguard the future of the chateau.

A NEW FUTURE FOR THE RUINS OF A CHATEAU

At Maisonnais-sur Tardoire, an association wants to breathe life into a medieval site. It is looking for helping hands and the finances to go ahead with its plans. The Association of the Friends of the Chateau of Lavauguyon would welcome volunteers to help on site and with cultural activities.

"There, that's the gothic arched entrance to the remains of the castle keep. Here, there was a draw-bridge. The moat would have been deeper." At Maisonnais-sur Tardoire in the Haute-Vienne, a handful of kilometres from Massignac, Marcel Malcombe is acting as guide around the chateau of Lavauguyon. He points to the remains of the chapel, reveals secrets of the once stately home and the still remaining underground chambers....impossible now to visit as it is too dangerous. The ruins are unstable.

It was Marcel Malcombe who founded the Friends of the Chateau of Lavauguyon in 2005 with one aim...to give life back to the medieval ruins that were hidden in the woods.

The Association became owner of the site in 2008. Since then, the chateau has gradually been revealed. "We began by cutting back the trees and vegetation. We cut 40 cubic metres of wood," explained the treasurer, Jean-Pierre Meriguet. At the present time, about ten volunteers are actively engaged in working on the site...cleaning up and cutting the grass.

Its interest lies in that it is complete to its foundations

Among those in the Association are: villagers who are concerned about the fate of the chateau, English residents whose imagination has been stirred by the site, and members of Graht charentais (the Tolvere archeological and historical group, an amateur group of Charentais enthusiasts).

"Everyone does what he or she can and each brings his/her own skill and interest," continues Marcel Malcombe.

"After the Revolution, they were obliged by decree to demolish the chateau. The most beautiful stones were sold."

The monument has been pillaged, stripped of its most beautiful assets.

"Look at the gothic chapel where there is still a magnificent column," points out Jean-Pierre Meriguet. For him, the principle interest of the chateau is that it is complete down to ground level, to its foundations. Everything is there: the four corner towers, the boulevard, the moat that surrounds the castle and the defensive wall that runs round it.

Archeological excavations and cultural events

In order to develop the site, the Association needs willing hands and money.

"It is absolutely necessary to consolidate what there is and to prevent further degradation," says Marcel Malcombe. "Without that, the ruin will eventually crumble away."

The Association has plans to employ an architect to carry out a preliminary study. Vincent Dupuy, president delegate, elaborates "This would allow us to define our priorities. The cost would be 20,000 euros. We hope to be able to obtain European funds."

The Friends of the Chateau can already count on the support of the commune of Maisonnais. "it is an interesting monument to have in this district. If we develop its potential we could attract more people here," says the mayor, Raoul Rechinac. "We are on the Route of Richard the Lion Heart, and close to the church of Les Salles Lavauguyon, a classified historical monument."

"We don't want to rebuild the chateau. But we must save it," concludes Jean-Pierre Meriguet. "Not only could this chateau become a special place for scholars, a space for research work, excavations, but we could also organise cultural events here." Already he sees a future with music concerts held in the grounds.