

THE CITADEL OF MONTREUIL-SUR-MER

The Citadel of Montreuil-sur-Mer is built on a 50-metre hill which overlooks the Canche valley. The Canche marshes to the north and the dry valley of La Madeleine-sous-Montreuil to the west provide the town with a natural defense. It joins the south eastern part of the town. The building of the Citadel began in 1567 and over the years it has been extended seven times into a complex structure. It was built on the site of a 13th century castle, some elements of which remain. Straddling the town walls it has two forms of defense, one facing the town, the other facing the countryside. Up to the end of the 19th century it was altered several times and it lost its military importance in 1929. It became a listed Ancient Monument in 1926.

The gate

The main entrance to the citadel faces the town. The engineers placed many obstacles in front of this weak spot. The gate is framed by two half-bastions. Vauban added a **ravelin**: a triangular-shaped fortification to protect the curtain walls between the two bastions. The gate is made up of two openings, a carriage gateway and a postern gate which is now walled up; typical of the Middle Ages.



Access to the citadel was defended by a cantilever draw-bridge, which was replaced by an earth slope in 1894. The gate has retained the slits through which the wooden beams connected to the draw-bridge, by chains, operated. Traces of the portcullis can still be seen inside the gateway. A guard-house was added in the 18th century.

The E tower

In the 15th century, the improvements in artillery forced the military engineers to find makeshift solutions. The technique which consisted in raising mounds of earth behind the walls was developed in order to resist the cannon fire. The height of the walls and towers was lowered to be a smaller target for enemy fire. The towers were filled in with earth to house artillery. The E tower is a model of this architectural improvement. Originally in sandstone and taller, it was reduced in size and refaced in brick at the end of the 15th century.

Practical information

Although it has been made safe, the monument is not hazard-free. Please supervise your children.

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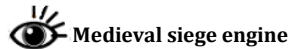
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The bastions of the citadel

Italian engineers finally found a solution to the problem caused by the improvements in artillery: they invented the bastion. The circular hollow towers were replaced by vast pentagonal fortifications filled with earth on which cannons were placed. There were **curtain walls** between the bastions to protect them from cannon fire. Their angular design solved the problem of **blind spots**. From this time on the enemy was completely exposed to the defender's fire, whatever their position.

In the 16th century, the border of the Low Countries ruled by Spain was situated 10km from Montreuil. As a result Charles IX (1560-1574) improved the town's defenses. In 1567 a star-shaped citadel with the five bastions was built. It used the latest defensive innovations of the time. An escape route was built at the end of the bastion, next to the castle gate, to provide a way out in case of attack.

As in all citadels built at that time, the main building was protected by outer-defenses. This slowed down the process of attack. On the outside of the ditch was a trench providing a protected area from which musketeers could then defend the glacis (steep slopes leading up to the fortress).



Medieval siege engine

The castle of Philippe Auguste

In 987 on the accession of Hugues Capet the town acquired royal importance and a castle was built. This castle was first documented in 1042. Until 1204, Montreuil was the only royal possession in the north of France. This strategic position placed the town at the heart of a conflict between the Capetians and the English Plantagenets, who were the allies of the Counts of Flanders, Boulogne and Ponthieu. This threat persuaded Philippe Auguste to build a new royal castle which is partly preserved within the 1567 citadel. Two large towers border the broken arch entrance. This polygonal castle (which inspired the one in Boulogne-sur-Mer a few years later) was separated from the town by a ditch. At each of its angles there was a protruding, multi-level, round tower with archery slits all the way round. Originally built in sandstone, the castle had to be rebuilt in brick at the top due to several attacks in the 16th century.

Queen Berthe's tower

This gate tower, equipped with many defense systems, for a long time was the main access to the town. It was called "the castle gate" because it was situated next to the castle of



Philippe Auguste. It was erected in the middle of the 14th century. The new means of defense, particularly cannons, forced the architects of the time to reinforce the walls. During the building of the citadel, this gate provided direct access to the fortress. It was considered dangerous and closed in 1599. It is said that Berthe of Holland was locked up in this tower. She was the wife of Philippe I, King of France, who disowned her in 1091. She died in Montreuil in 1094.

The rampart walk

Its construction in the 16th century required the towers of the royal castle to be lowered. It is supported by a series of brick arches. Without any real defensive advantage in modern times, the walk facilitated movement along the northern front of attack. Its commanding position over the surrounding countryside allowed warnings of attack to be given. From the rampart walk, you can see from west to east the lighthouse of Le Touquet, the sea-side towns, the Widehem wind farm, the river Canche, the Carthusian monastery of Notre-Dame des Près in Neuville-sous-Montreuil and the forest of Hesdin.

The White Tower



The White Tower is named after the colour of the chalk. This tower was part of the town before it was incorporated into the citadel. Rebuilt around 1500, it has kept its 13th century sandstone base of archery slits. The ground floor with its pointed roof vaults shows the adaptation of new defense techniques. Here, the archery slits have given way to cannon ports with observation slits above. On the first floor, the guard-house has a "pepper-pot" roof and was made comfortable with a fireplace and several openings.

The casemates

Found at the heart of the bastion, the casemates are made up of five rib-vaulted chambers in succession. Each chamber was built on two levels separated by a removable floor which no longer exists. Above the firing slits is an opening which allowed the smoke to escape. These slits ensured the defense of the surrounding ditch. Louis Philippe I ordered its construction in 1844 as he feared France would be attacked by Prussia. During the First World War, it housed the communications centre of the British army from 1916 to 1919.



WW1 General Headquarters (GHQ) exhibition

The arsenal

Built over two floors during the reign of Louis XIV, the arsenal held arms and military equipment.

The chapel

With a neo-classical façade, the rectangular chapel dates from the 17th century and was rebuilt in 1764.

The gunpowder magazine

It was built in around 1670 inspired by those that Vauban built in the Alps and notably the one in Mont Dauphin.

Insulated by a surrounding wall through which there is an entrance defended by a sentry-box, the building is supported by nine large buttresses with a passage in between. The very high roof vault was covered with earth so that cannon-balls could be embedded without exploding. The floor was raised in order to avoid rising damp.

Glossary:

Blind spot: ground not reachable by defensive fire from a fortification.

Bastion: five-sided projecting part of a fortification.

Curtain wall: a non-load-bearing external wall between two towers or bastions.

Ravelin: a triangular shaped fortification to protect the curtain walls between the two bastions.