



L'Hotel de Ville (Town Hall) of Aire-sur-la-Lys

– three in the middle and four on each wing. The central window opens onto a balcony supported by a *cul de lampe*.

The facade is balanced by ten pilasters, five on either side of the central bay ; the innermost pair is double. It is crowned with a balustrade with a remarkable sequence of statues and trophies. The central pediment is of a height nearly equal to the main body of the building. Effigies of Power and Justice, distributed between one part and another, support the whole. In the middle, the coat of arms of the town now replace the bust and the arms of Louis XV as initially installed. At the apex, is a figure of the sun-god Apollo, the emblem of Louis XIV.

The Beffroi had been re-built at the back of the Hotel de Ville. It is slightly out of line with the main building to allow space for the Rue des Hallettes. It is forty-five metres high. The clock with four faces and a carillon were installed in 1724. The first floor is taken up with what is known as the Salle du Loup to which there is access from behind the Hotel de Ville. The word *loup*, or wolf, refers back to the time when the seal of the town was an image of a running wolf. At the top of the beffroi was once a balustrade with four urns and sculpted flames. They were taken down in 1980 because of the danger and replaced with a " provisional " concrete wall.

THE INTERIOR

Until 1830, the ground floor was occupied by little shops and, until 1851, the right wing of the building was the Auberge of the Conciergerie. The town made use only of the first floor and the left wing. In 1891, the municipal library was installed on the ground floor of the left wing. The first floor has retained its original purpose with the great salon, the Hall, in front of the *Salle des Fetes*, the chapel now converted into an office, and the town clerk`s office before the *salle des mariages*. The magistrate`s audience chambers and the secret room were put to other uses.

The Hotel de Ville and the Beffroi were classified as historic monuments in 1947.

After Aire was returned to France in 1713, the Town Magistrate obtained authorisation from Louis XIV to build a new town hall to replace the old one which was thought to be too modest. Permission was given out of recognition of the suffering of the town in the siege of 1710 and under Dutch occupation.

The project was also placed in the hands of Heroguel, the royal architect and the contract was awarded to Pierre Descamps. Building began on 11th May, 1716 and was finished by the end of 1721.

Meanwhile, the old beffroi had collapsed in 1708 and so the construction of a replacement was begun, to be finished in 1724.

Note the following in :

LA SALLE DES MARIAGES the great marble fireplace decorated with ceramic tiles from Desvres (1930) ; the seventeenth-century statues of the four Cardinal Virtues which came from the Collegial Church of Saint Pierre (acquired 1792) ; two pictures depicting J. de Caverel and his wife, Marie de Malbrancq ; a picture representing the Spanish army before Aire in 1641 ; the banner of the Echo des Bardes, given to the town by Jules Hunebelle in 1870.

LA SALLE DE L`AMITIE (PREVIOUSLY THE SALLE DES FETES) the text of the Charter granted to the town in 1188 by the Count of Flanders, Philippe d`Alsace.

LES HALLETES the beamed ceiling, dating from 1716.

THE TOWN REFERENCE LIBRARY the municipal archives and the religious deeds of various parishes from the end of the sixteenth century.

EXTERIOR ORNAMENTATION

The majestic building that we see today has not been modified since it was built.

The facade is pierced by two central doors, the one gives access to the gallery, known as the " Hallettes ", the other to a grand staircase. Between the two doors, a marble plaque with a Latin description once displayed the names of those who presided over the construction of the building. It has since disappeared. The second level of the facade is pierced by eleven openings.



[Text by the Cultural and Historical Association of Aire. A full description of the hotel de ville is for sale in the Office of Tourism (3 euros)]