



The Bailliage (magistrate's court) of Aire-sur-la-Lys

The frieze consists of 32 square *metopes* (frames), carrying finely sculpted motifs. They represent the attributes of the Golden Fleece ; tinder-boxes surmounting gnarled staves in the form of the Cross of St Andrew ; the initials and the insignia of the House of Burgundy : AIFM ; containers and various stands of arms with halberds, shields, pikes, swords, muskets, powder horns, helmets... Two shells of Saint-Jacques mark the ends of the frieze.

Facing the Rue du Bourg at the centre of the pediments of the first-floor windows are two cartouches. They are marked " ANNO " and " 1600 ", the date of construction of the building. Facing the Rue d'Arras on the tympanum of a window, is a helmeted Bellona, goddess of war, surrounded by various weapons of the sixteenth-century. On the side facing the Grand Place are mythological personifications, half-men, half-crocodiles, confronting each other in combat, set on either side of the breteche.

An attic at the top of the building is decorated with statues of the three theological virtues (Faith, Hope, and Charity), the four cardinal virtues (Prudence, Justice, Strength, and Temperance), the four medieval elements (Fire, Water, Air, and Earth), and a personage, the representation of Pierre Framery, the master of works for the building.

Finally, the roof is surmounted with a weather-cock in the form of Sagittarius.

In 1907, a sandstone replica of the arms of the Tramerie family was erected under the arcades which came from the Palace of the Salle.

INTERIOR DECORATION

The interior is of course less extravagant than the exterior. There are four levels :

- the cellar, the vault of which has been supported by masonry since 1750 to prevent it from collapsing.
- the ground-floor room, measuring six metres by seven, paved with bricks. A handsome fireplace displays the arms of Artois. A remarkable wooden staircase leads to the first-floor ; its rail is original.
- the great chamber on the first-floor, measures ten metres by eleven. The original partitions have been dismantled. It has a fine fireplace, decorated with ceramic tiles made in Aire in the eighteenth-century. Note especially the beautiful woodwork of the ceiling.
- the attics which in previous times served as accommodation for the soldiers.

The bailliage has been used for various purposes (guard-house, magistrate's court, temporary town hall before the Revolution, toll-house, and police-station in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From 1970, it has been the home of the Office of Tourism for Aire.

The great chamber on the first floor is used for exhibitions.

The Bailliage was classified as a historic monument in 1886.



The building is situated in the angle of the town square and the Rue d'Arras. It was built in 1600 in the style of the Flemish Renaissance as the guardhouse for the town militia. It is commonly known as the *bailliage* because between 1634 and 1789 it served as the courthouse of the military justice at a period when the inhabitants participated in the military defence of their town.

The general prosperity of the town under the Archdukes enabled the Magistrate to undertake an important programme of municipal building. The town representatives celebrated their authority by :

- founding the collegial Church of Saint-Pierre.
- establishing the church of Notre Dame (since destroyed).
- building new butchers' premises.

In consequence, the building of the bailliage was able to take advantage of the skilled workmen who were already present in Aire doing other work.

The Mayor in post in 1597, Jacques de Caverel, obtained the necessary authorisation from Brussels to levy the taxes to build the guard-house in the market place. The work began in 1600 under the supervision of the town authorities and, on the 22. November, they were able to go ahead with the inauguration of the building, although it was not to be entirely finished for several years.

The bailliage consists of an irregular quadrilateral, 125 square metres at ground level. The three facades overlook the Grand Place, the Rue d'Arras, and what was at the time the Rue de Cuisiniers (cooks). The architect, Pierre Framery, was influenced by the design of a building, part of the ancient Town Hall of Amsterdam (destroyed in 1651). The use of a model accounts for the rapidity with which the bailliage was built and this in turn accounts for the fragility of the building which has had to be restored many times over the centuries.

EXTERIOR ORNAMENTATION

The facades are richly ornamented, including those which are not easily seen. On the facades facing the Grand Place and the Rue du Bourg, elegant stone pillars support four and then three arcades respectively.

A *breteche* (small roofed balcony), a detail characteristic of Flemish architecture, makes this a small Italianised brother of the municipal palaces of the Netherlands. An intermediary frieze above the arcades runs round the building.

[Text by the Cultural and Historical Association of Aire-sur-la-Lys. A description of the Bailliage is available in the Office of Tourism (3 euros). A more detailed study by Gerard Aubert and Jean Fournier is also available in the bookshop (19 euros)]