

THE HOUSE OF THE STORY OF LES ARCS

The purpose of this building is to bring to life again the rich past of a Provençal village, a past which has, for too long, been forgotten.



Certain aspects of the Les Arcs story have been emphasised :

- On the ground floor – The Middle Ages
- On the first floor – The period of the French Revolution



We hope that you will enjoy entering into our past with us and seeing the old stones of the medieval quarter known as *Le Parage* come to life again.

1. THE MEDIEVAL VILLAGE

Feudal organisation, especially in the mediterranean region, tended to group the population of *les villages perchés* or hilltop villages around the keep of the castle from which the Feudal Lord exercised his rule.

These fortified villages were called *castrum* as in *le castrum d'Arcus* – Les Arcs.

2. THE CAROLINGIENNE VILLA D'ARCUS

The oldest document mentioning the name of Les Arcs dates from 909.

It occurs in an inventory drawn up by a large property-owner named Fouquier, the descendant of an aristocratic family based in Avignon.

Today this constitutes the birth certificate of Les Arcs.

'Villa' in that period indicated a vast agricultural estate. Situated on the plain of Fantrousières, the estate was surrounded by dry stone walls. A wooden structure supported a thatched roof. Following local practice, there must have been a grouping of three buildings delimiting a central courtyard for the masters and two other buildings for the agricultural labourers and their families. A sheepfold, a stable and a large well must also have been there.

Model : ERIC KALMAR – Les Arcs 2006

Figures : FOUQUE – Aix en Provence

3. THE BIRTH OF LES ARCS VILLAGE

The oldest document containing the name 'Les Arcs' dates from 909. It refers to a *villa carolingienne*, meaning an agricultural estate of several thousand hectares from Charlemagne's dynasty (roughly 768-987). This property, called *Arcus* was situated on a plain to the west of the present village. The name refers to the arched bridge which crosses the river Argens to the south of the village.

The *castrum*, the central fortification, was built before 1040, and was surrounded by a curtain wall. Within this space, the count had eight houses and two housing of co-lords. His fellow lords also lived within the walls of the *castrum*. We have here, then, the origin of the name 'Le Parage' : it indicated the quarters of the nobility, distinctly separated from the village below where the peasants lived.

On October 1 1200, Alphonse II, Count of Provence, gave the castrum and the villa of Les Arcs, along with territory around Trans, La Motte and Les Esclans to Giraud de Villeneuve, a knight of Catalonia recently arrived in Provence. The Villeneuve family ruled over Les Arcs and these surrounding territories for almost five centuries.

4. SOME DATES IN THE HISTORY OF LES ARCS

558 - King Childebert, son of King Clovis of the Franks, cedes to Germain, Bishop of Paris, a property with olive trees, the 'Salle-Roubaud' which had to supply oil for church lighting.

1030 - *Castrum* constructed.

1039 - Roubaud, founder of the noble dynasty established by King Louis the Blind, takes up residence at Salle-Roubaud, later to become Sainte Roseline.

1150 - Raymond Bérenger III of Barcelona, Count of Provence, arrives in Les Arcs during a military campaign which he is leading against Raymond de Baux. He takes possession of the domain which rightfully belongs to him.

1200 - Alphonse II, Count of Provence, makes a gift of the castrum, the villa of Les Arcs and the territories of La Motte and Les Esclans to Giraud Villeneuve, valiant Catalan knight and Alphonse's faithful follower. In return, Giraud de Villeneuve agrees that these lands will no longer shelter the rebels.

1224 - Romée de Villeneuve enters the service of Raymond Bérenger V, Count of Provence.

1245 - Death of Raymond Bérenger V. Through the mediation of Romée de Villeneuve, the count's four daughters become queens.

1250 - Romée de Villeneuve dictates his will in the bedchamber of the noble lord Arnaud de Villeneuve at the castle of *Les Arcs*.

1670 – 1720 - The seigneurie or lords of Vintimille succeed to the Villeneuve lands.

1792 – 1794 - Violent confrontations between the Fédon family, who are monarchists, and the Truc family, who favour reform.

1851 - People from *Les Arcs* deeply involved during the insurrection against Napoleon III's coup d'Etat.

5. THE PRESTIGIOUS ARMS OF PROVENCE

What is the origin of the bright red blades on a gold background that make up the coats of arms of Provence ?

Bernado Boades in *Historia de Catalunya* (1420) offers this explanation :

When Wilfred Long Hair was of an age to rule his lands he was still a vassal of Emperor Charles the Bald (875-877), at that time at war with the Normans. This being so, it is said that Wilfred went to offer his services, and those of his nobles and knights, to Charles. So valiantly did they fight in a battle between the Emperor and the Normans that many nobles and their followers in Wilfred's army were killed or wounded, and Wilfred himself was wounded. When the Emperor was told this, he went straight to Wilfred's tent where he saw Wilfred bleeding heavily from his wounds. Then he soaked his four fingers in the blood streaming from Wilfred's wounds, soaked them once again, and then drew

them across the count's shield, which was just gilt and bore no particular arms, since William had wished to receive them from the hands of the Emperor himself, having gained them by feats on the battlefield. 'So, bold warrior, receive your coat of arms and those of your descendants' said Charles, 'they flow from your magnificent courage and will be finer than the arms of any other baron.'

6. ROMÉE DE VILLENEUVE CALLED 'ROMÉE THE GREAT' (1200 – 1250) CONSTABLE AND MINISTER OF RAIMOND BÉRENGER V, COUNT OF PROVENCE

I About 1226 Romée was at the court of Raimond Bérenger V in the role of a magistrate or judge responsible for Provence. He succeeded in establishing his authority over his lands and in exacting obedience from the feudal lords.

Having gained the confidence of the count by his clever administration, Romée was made the tutor of Raimond's last daughter, who would be the Count's inheritor.

Through Romée's good offices, the Count's daughters married kings :

- Eleonore, in 1233, had married Henry III, the Plantagenet king of England
- Marguerite, in 1234, had married Louis IX (St Louis, king of France)
- Sancie, in 1242, married Richard of Cornwall, future king of the Romans
- Beatrix, in 1246, married Charles I of Anjou, king of Naples and Sicily and brother of St Louis

The regency council, wished to limit Charles's powers in order to privilege those of Beatrix, who would not accept limitations on her rule. The council dismissed Romée in June 1247. Withdrawing from public affairs, he died in 1250. Despite attacks on his reputation, Romée is celebrated by Dante in his poem *The Divine Comedy* as a model of integrity.

7. SOLEMN ACT DICTATING A WILL AND TESTAMENT

The first document to make explicit mention of the castle at Les Arcs is the will dictated by Romée de Villeneuve on December 15 1250 'in the bedchamber of the Lord Arnaud de Villeneuve which is adjacent to the tower'.

Romée was attempting to sort out a somewhat muddled financial situation. His two sons would only receive a small part of the considerable fortune which he had amassed : the rest would be left to the province of Provence and to the deceased's creditors.

8. HÉLION DE VILLENEUVE (1263 – 1346)

Grand Master of the Order of the Hospitalers of Saint John of Jerusalem. The Villeneuve, of Catalonian origin, first appeared formally in Provence in the person of Giraud de Villanova.

Héliion was born towards 1263, the sixth of seven children of Giraud II de Villeneuve and Aigline. The castle where he was born and spent his childhood is now marked by the ruins at the top of the hill which dominates the old village of Les Arcs, in the medieval quarter of the Parage.

One of his sisters was Sainte Roseline whose body is preserved in a shrine in the chapel of the former Carthusian monastery of Celle-Roubaud, where Roseline was a prioress. In 1291 Héliion fought courageously in the defence of St John of Acre in the Holy Land.

Héliion also took part in a crusade to Rhodes where he was captured by the Saracens. Tradition has it that he was miraculously liberated thanks to the intervention of his sister Roseline. The Pope arranged the election of Héliion to Grand Master following the resignation of Foulques de Villaret. Héliion's term as Grand Master was divided into two periods, one in Provence and the other in Rhodes. He died in Rhodes on May 27 1346.

9. THE DUBBING OF A KNIGHT

Over the centuries, the ceremonies relating to a knight's ordination were complicated. A squire was ordained as a knight in the course of a solemn ceremony consecrated by the church. He passed the preceding night in prayer: this was the 'vigil of arms'.

Thus 'dubbed' the new knight took possession of his helmet, a shield and a lance then mounted a horse to demonstrate his new status to the vicinity.

10. THE DEGRADATION OF A KNIGHT

After the description of dubbing, it may be of interest to describe the reverse ceremony which is much less well-known.

A knight convicted 'of treachery, denial of the faith, or some other capital crime or atrocity' was hoisted, fully accoutred, on a scaffold with his reversed shield placed at the top of a mast. Twelve priests then sang the death watch breaking off after each psalm, during which pause parts of the perfidious knight's accoutrements were stripped from him, from his helmet to his spurs. Lastly, his shield was broken into three pieces. Finally, he was handed over to a provost marshal or a torturer according to whether royal justice had condemned him to banishment or to death.

11. THE 'RANCOEURS' OF 1366

In many villages and small towns of the province, the XIII century saw the first attempts to organise inhabitants into communities and to fix taxes to be demanded by the lords and their subordinate vassals. Some of the taxes imposed were only limited by the goodwill, or otherwise, of the master and the solvency of his subjects. In 1366 the inhabitants rose up against charges which they considered demeaning and unsupportable. A document lists a series of complaints, *rancœurs*, presented by Bernard Valier (prosecutor for the community of Les Arcs' inhabitants) against Arnaud III de Villeneuve. A series of responses is given – sound conclusions by judges which secured personal freedoms.

A couple of examples :

Complaint :	Response :
Forced labour : his lordships demands that the men and women of Les Arcs work for him, manhandles and imprisons them.	He may have day labourers at a common salary, and the labourers must be aware of this and give his lordship preference.
Demand for the hearts and tongues of all cattle slaughtered at home	The heart alone.

12. THE MASK OF INFAMY

The mask of infamy or disgrace inflicts two punishments, one spiritual, the other physical. The first punishment was through the forced wearing of a grotesque mask, the second through the physical pain inflicted by the clamping of the nose and mouth, and being placed in stocks or shackles. The aim was to expose, in the market place at busy times, those who had contravened the basic rules of the social order.

13. TORTURE

Why mention this topic in relation to Les Arcs ?

If a reason were needed, one might point to the discovery, in 1960, of a gaol in the medieval quarter of the Parage.

In every period societies have been led, in the interests of internal security or control, to demonise certain minorities: sorcerers, heretics, the sick etc. The accused could not be punished without proof of guilt. Evidence might be provided by a confession : this being the case, the door was open to the use of torture to obtain such a confession.

Torture had been revived in the Middle Ages, but it had always existed and was used quite legally in the ancient world.

14. JUSTICE

Until the French Revolution, a diverse range of legal authorities prevailed. This gave royal justice a divine quality.

Justice in the Medieval period : The Medieval period is renowned for its violence, and violence is to be found in the domain of criminal justice at this time. In fact, the medieval torturers had an embarrassment of choices in making the accused confess their crimes. Torture took different forms : '*le lardage*', for example, was a practice which consisted of pouring boiling fat over the skin of the person under interrogation. On December 15 1340 Hugo Thesacius and Pierre Jehan de Bargemon, suspected of sorcery, were subjected to *le lardage*. The torturer claimed 1 sou and 4 deniers for three pounds of fat.

Other means of making criminals talk included immersion, amputation, hanging and drowning. For those accused of adultery, *la fustigation*, flogging till the blood ran, was in order, Blasphemers risked *l'arrachage*, pincers on the tongue, or *le percement*, piercing the tongue with a hot iron. Once the crime was confessed, the accused risked not so much prison, generally reserved for the nobility, but banishment.

Justice in the Modern period : We know from inscriptions left by prisoners that the Clock Tower of Les Arcs was a place of imprisonment during the Modern era. In fact, at the time of the east-to-west migrations, the people of Les Arcs suffered the frequent presence of troops of soldiers, and the least commendable were imprisoned in the Clock Tower. One of them wrote: 'to have been thrown into prison for not having groomed the horses'. The prisoner Jean Baptiste Francou left numerous traces of his passing. They are visible to this day.

The work of the Revolution : The judicial system of the old regime did not with stand the French Revolution. The list of grievances demanded its transformation and reorganisation by the revolutionaries. They introduced the principle that justice should be free and equal to all. They separated judicial and administrative functions, installed the right of appeal and created juries of the people in criminal matters. Finally, they professionalised the magistracy. Citizens' justice replaced that of the monarch.

15. SAINT ROSELINE'S CHAPEL.

4 kilomètres to the east of *Les Arcs* lies St Roseline's Chapel, classed as a historic monument in 1980. Here one may see works of art, both ancient and modern, set like jewels in a casket of Romanesque architecture.

St Roseline's body lies in a crystal shrine. Born January 27 1263 in the castle of Les Arcs, she was the daughter of Giraud II de Villeneuve and Aigline, his wife.

16. PLAN OF THE PARAGE

The Keep : the only remaining vestige of the castle constructed by Giraud II de Villeneuve in the thirteenth century.

The Clock Tower : square barbican (*) tower included in the ramparts in 1358. The smaller tower at the top is made of tufa, a porous volcanic stone, and supports a bell tower (1662) – a masterpiece with six faces.

The Chapel of Saint Pierre du Parage : formerly the parish church of Our Lady, mentioned for the first time in the charter of 1050. The chapel was reconstructed towards the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth, with alterations in the sixteenth century. Renovated in 1960.

Place Paul Simon : notice the former building of '*L'Espital des Pôvres de Jesus-Christ*', a place of welcome and a hospice for the destitute.

The Parish Church of Saint John the Baptist (outside the wall): this building is in the tradition of provencal churches of the nineteenth century with regard to its classical ornamentation. Fine interior, including the *Altarpiece of the Virgin* (1501) painted by Louis Bréa.

17. SAINT SEBASTIAN

Born in the third century of the modern era, Sebastian of Narbonne was a captain in the guard of the Roan Emperor Diocletian. Because he would not deny his Christian faith, Sebastian was tied to an almond tree and riddled with arrows. In 680 the inhabitants of Les Arcs preyed to him to protect them from the plague which was ravaging the region: they were saved.

This is why for thirteen centuries every January 20 the Christians of Les Arcs reiterate their gratitude to the 'Saint Benefactor'. The statuette of the saint is taken from the chapel of the Parage in a spectacular and resounding procession. Members of the clergy and the municipal authorities follow the statuette of the saint which is borne by members of an order of penitents.

18. THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE PENITENTS

The penitents were the faithful who, in Southern France, grouped themselves into brotherhoods in order to fulfil certain duties of devotion and charity, like singing divine offices in their own chapel, burying the dead, assisting the sick and organising processions.

19. ABOUT THE REPUBLICAN HERITAGE OF LES ARCS...

From Villeneuve to Vintimille : François-Claude de Vintimille obtained the feudal domain of Les Arcs in 1720, and so a barony became a marquisate.

The French Revolution : The community of Les Arcs grumbled more about the abuses of power by petty local despots than those of the lord himself. Guillaume Fédon was one of these petty tyrants.

At the moment of the Revolution it was the Fédon family, rather than the Vintimille, against whom all the weight of anti-

feudal hatred crystallised. In league against them they could see the republican « clan » fomented by the rival Truc family, themselves of the same social milieu as the Fédons.

Antoine Truc : Republican *arcois* (native of Les Arcs), public notary of Les Arcs in 1777 and mayor of Les Arcs in 1792. He was elected Deputy for Var and, in 1799, member of Council of Five Hundred, the lower house of the French Legislature in the later years of the French Revolution. Previously he had been an appeal judge at the District Tribunal of Draguignan, 1793-1794.

He resigned refusing to compromise himself through involvement in *La Terreur*, a phase of the French Revolution around 1793-1794, usually characterised as brutally repressive.

20. SOME EXTRACTS FROM THE LIST OF GRIEVANCES OF LES ARCS TO THE ASSEMBLY OF THE COMMUNITY IN 1789.(presented elsewhere at length)

Sirs,

We here assembled in the best interests of us all. That is, to move towards consolidating the prosperity of the state, and to break the remaining bonds of feudal slavery under which we have long groaned.

It is to the best, the most just of kings that we owe so much of our well-being. The true father of the people wishes his children to make known to him their wrongs in order to put them right. He was viewed with sadness a nation weighed down with extraordinary debts following a long and extravagant war, and the wretched management of its costs.

These things must have profoundly affected the responsive soul of our good king.

Ah, dear Prince, such paternal solicitude secures you forever in the hearts of your faithful subjects.

(All this clearly moved the king, Louis XVI, whose head the faithful subjects' removed.)

On the monarchy...

On the nobility...

Worthy dignitaries and commoners...

On the clergy : my desire is that His Majesty is urgently begged to declare, by an irrevocable law, that it is only by a gross abuse, the result of clerical despotism obtaining in a period of absolute ignorance, that the clergy calls itself an order...

The Reform Laws : I add my pleas to those of all the good citizens to request of His Majesty the reform of criminal and civil law, uniformity of laws throughout the kingdom and the uniformity of all currency, weights, measures and taxes.

On justice...

The administration of Communes : one abuse remains to be remedied, in my view, and this abuse lies within the Commune itself. Municipal administrations which should be the guardians of public liberty are often the source of an oppression the more onerous since it impinges more acutely on the household of the citizen.

On divorce... : this solution which is good for simple peoples will be a destructive poison for a nation like ours, already advanced in moral corruption.

Solicitors...

Taxes...

I mandate my representatives to request the Communes of Provence that our statutes be preserved.

21. THE UPRISING OF 1851 IN THE VILLAGE OF LES ARCS

*For a long time, official history recorded nothing, or very little, of this incident. Only the writer Emile Zola related this epic event in his novel **The Fortune of the Rougons** (1871).*

The president of the Second Republic was Louis Bonaparte. Though not eligible for re-election, he wished to maintain himself in power. On December 2 1851, he resolved to execute a coup d'état. Shortly afterwards he proclaimed himself Emperor. By this gesture the Republic of 1848 was abolished. Resistance to this coup d'état makes up part of a large page of history written by the people of Var.

Var was, in fact, the theatre of a popular movement for liberty and the defence of the rule of law. In order to save the Republic, an armed uprising took place, an uprising that lasted for seven days. Seven days in which the insurgents got together and organised themselves to take over local government. Uniting all their forces into one powerful column which marched towards the prefecture, they then hesitated, changed direction and headed towards Aups. In the end they were met by the army which crushed and dispersed them, threatening pitiless repression.

News of Louis Bonaparte's coup came to Les Arcs on December 3 1851. The following day, street demonstrations took the form of a long file of people winding through the town as if in the provençal dance, la farandole. Some of the townspeople took hostage the mayor, Osmin Truc. *'Thus, he shared the lot of the Marquis de Colbert, symbolic of the communal fate of notables whether 'blue' or 'white' in the epoch of the 'red 'peril.'**

* from *The Republic in the Village: The People of the Var from the French Revolution to the Second Republic* by Maurice Agulhon 1969.

22. THE URBANISATION OF LES ARCS – A VILLAGE OF STREETS

Les Arcs acquired the character of a *village-rue* in the course of the XIX century and at the beginning of the XX century as a consequence of several factors coming together over 150 years.

First, as in Provence generally, there was *deperchment*, whereby, at the end of the XVIII century, villages moved from being 'perched' on hilltops to flatter places more accessible by road and, much later, by the irruption of the railway.

In Les Arcs in particular, this is evidenced by the abandonment of the former kernel of the village, Le Parage, by those families with deep roots there, either through complete exodus, or the removal to other parts of the village, and their replacement by foreigners – mostly Italians between 1900 and 1940, and, after 1950, by several North African families. It is also evidenced by the gradual dilapidation of the houses of Le Parage.

This process of deterioration may also have followed from the municipal council's deliberations between 1935 and 1950 which regularly demanded the demolition of buildings which endangered village life.