



# The municipal Reference Library, (the Bibliotheque) of Aire-sur-la-lys

On 4. March, 1891 the municipal reference library of Aire-sur-la-Lys was installed in the locality where it is today on the ground floor of the right wing of the beautiful Town Hall.

The reading room with its harmonious proportions is also decorated with oak woodwork which holds the local collections of archives arranged according to a systematic and practical classification. This arrangement of books and shelves contributes to the special atmosphere



of the Bibliotheque, the guardian of the treasures of the past.

The bindings of books in lace or with coats of arms contrast with the little ironwork of the eighteenth century and the romantic bindings of the nineteenth.

Open to the public in 1839, the public reference library was instituted by a municipal decree on the 14. November, 1838 on the advice of the Mayor, Hippolyte Mahieu-Milon. At the opening the stock consisted of 331 volumes decorated with the arms of the town which had survived

the Revolution. The stock covered several domains of knowledge : 19 volumes of language dictionaries ; 138 of jurisprudence and the law ; 43 of science and literature ; 117 of history ; 14 of gazettes. A committee was established, including Martin, Louis Deslions, Froissart principal of the college, and Dumoutier, a doctor.

The site of the bibliotheque was actually in the shops next to the Mayor`s office. From December 1847 to May 1848, it was directed by Charles Menche-Jeannet. He was assisted by Bucquet who succeeded Menche-Jeannet in 1848. An astute acquisition policy was followed which did not neglect any of the great themes of the Edition Francais.

The Bibliotheque was closed, however, at the end of 1850 and re-opened 1. July, 1851 under a new administration. Having been removed for some time to a locale near the convent of the English Poor Claires with access via the great door, the Bibliotheque was eventually housed in the attics of the Hotel de Ville in 1858.

On 7. November 1890, the mayor and his council gave the bibliotheque a new momentum. They decided to transfer it to the ground floor of the Town Hall. The Mayor, Andre Faucquette, wrote to the minister, " Our bibliotheque opens three times a week between two o`clock and five. One must bind all the volumes, repair those that are damaged ". The inventory taken in 1900 recorded 10,434 volumes. At the last count in the 1990s there were 18,000 printed works.

We hold onto these varied collections where each domain of knowledge is represented by beautiful works ; among them, *belles lettres*, rich in translations

and ancient editions, great writers of literature both national and foreign, and *sciences and arts* which range from philosophy to music by way of technology and the sciences.

These are represented by a fine edition of natural history by Buffon (1802). The history collections (Antiquity, France and elsewhere) include a number of important memoirs and accounts composed by witnesses to great events.

Among the smaller holdings are theology, beaux arts, and theatre. They are interesting because of the quality items they contain.

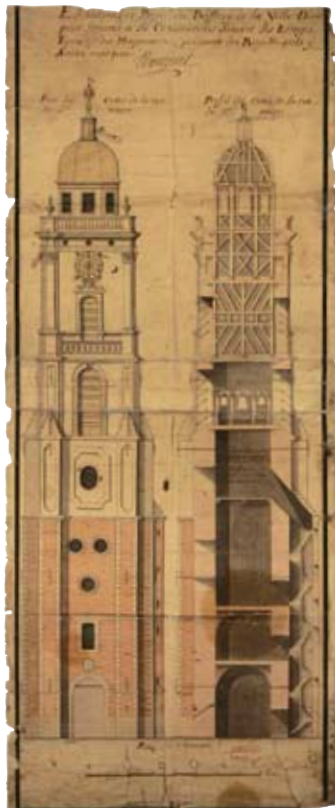
Apart from its manuscripts (87 classifications), the bibliotheque has gathered together a holding of nearly 18,000 works (printed books rare or valuable from the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries), 735 volumes of local material, 307 periodicals to which can be added collections of plans, maps, sketches, plates (400 items).

The bibliotheque also acts as the depository of the municipal archives of the Ancien Regime, dating from the first charter in 1188. Well looked after, the archives enable one to follow the evolution of the town up to the



Revolution. One can select from this great series the enabling acts and the political ones of the commune. The most notable are the charters since 1188 ; the records of the deliberations of the bishopric from 1739 to Year I, iv (the calendar was transformed at the Revolution) ; the municipal registers from 1724 to Year VII ; the town accounts from 1483 to 1789 ; the records of the correspondence of the Magistrate from 1796. A computer-based catalogue is available for readers. Alongside these chronicles of Aire and carefully preserved in the texts are various collections which bear witness to the intellectual history of the town.

The bishopric (which was the municipal council under the *ancien regime*) owned books which by their sense of belonging to the locality remained within the community. Note especially *l'encyclopedie ou dictionnaire raisonne* in 33 volumes of which four are of illustrative plates was published by Diderot and d'Alembert in the eighteenth century ; *Les Oeuvres de Maitre Rabelais* (1711) ; *Les Lettres de Rousseau* on various literary topics, published by Louis Racine (1750) ; *Les Oeuvres du Comte de Buffon* (1774). Until the eighteenth century, numerous lawyers and men of the law lived in Aire. They have left behind works of jurisprudence and theology. For example, the Bibliotheque possesses a *Commentaire Litteral sur tous les Livres de l'Ancienne et du Nouveau Testament*, published 1712 by R.P. Dom Augustin Calmet, a Benedictine of the order of Saint-Vanne and Saint-Hyulphe.



Another is *l'Histoire du Vieux et du Nouveau Testament* (1687) by the Sieur de Sombrevail. In the legal material is the



*Code penal, ou Recueil des principales ordonnances, edits et declarations sur les crimes et delits* (1752). Also there is *le code militaire ou compilation des reglements et ordonnances de Louis XIV, roy de France and Navarre* (1709). Also, *les lois militaires recueillies du droit Romain* (1672) and *Le Droit public de L'Europe fonde sur les traites* (1748).

The local holdings grow as time passes through acquisitions, subscriptions, gifts from scholars or local notables, and deposits of the state.

The bibliotheque holds several documents originating in the Chateau de Roquetoire which the Marquis of Ligny had built early in the eighteenth century on land acquired from the Spanish Crown.

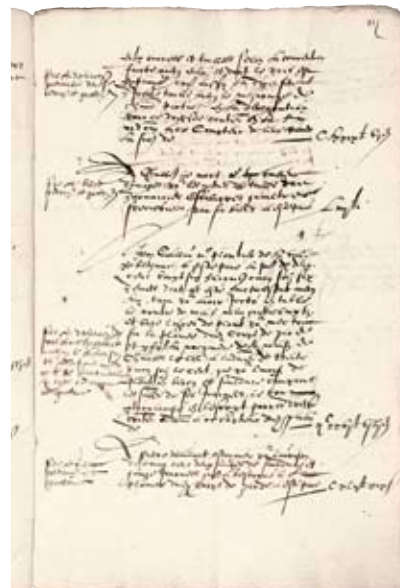
The Second Empire offered the Bibliotheque a collection of Latin and Greek authors ; among them *Les oeuvres completes historiques de Chateaubriand* edited in 1840 by Firmin Didot. Also, *les oeuvres poetique de Boileau* edited in 1824 by Froment. These collections are distinguished by their originality ; in particular, the *Biographie universelle* of F.X. Feller (1841) and *Le grand dictionnaire de Pierre Larousse* and *La grande geographie Bond illustree*, published under the direction of Onesime Reclus.

The local holdings are continuously enriched and completed by purchases. They gather together not only printed works (books, instalments, pages), but also manuscripts from generous donors. The Abbe Denuncq, former monk of Clairmarais, wrote sixteen volumes, all concerning the history of Artois. Note the *Coustumes generales de la chatellerie et bailliage d'Aire, member de la compte*

*d'Artois* (XVII<sup>th</sup> C., MS 2) ; the collection *Coustumes de la ville et banlieue de Saint-Omer, ensembles celle de la prouveste de Monstroeul* attributed to Mathieu Van der Woestyne de Saint-Omer (MS 3, 1598) ; the *logica Jesuitarum*, the philosophic notebook of the Jesuit College of Aire, including an engraved representation of Homer (MS 7, XVII C.).

The contribution of private collections forms a deposit which is particularly interesting. Baron Andre Joseph Camille Dard, a passionate antiquarian and erudite archaeologist, was Mayor of Aire in 1883, 1884, and 1888. He possessed a considerable library of more than 3000 volumes and many plans, manuscripts and diverse items. Most of his material concerned Artois and the locality of Aire. His collection was sold by public auction at Saint-Omer in November 1893. Aire acquired thirty-odd titles and five manuscripts ; among them *l'analyse des registres capitulaires recueil de documents concernant le chapitre de Saint-Pierre d'Aire de 1433 to 1775 ; la relation du siege de 1710 ; l'atlas du canton d'Aire en 1772.*

With regard to newspapers, the bibliotheque holds complete collections of : *La revue europeene, Le charivari, l'Athenaeum francais, le Renovateur, le Journal des Dames et des Modes, l'Apollon*, etc. from the nineteenth century. Where local affairs are concerned, note the more or less complete collection of the local paper, *L'echo de la Lys*. It is invaluable



for acquiring a greater knowledge of the town and its locality.

The bibliotheque also holds the parish registers and those of the civil administration of Aire for a period which extends from 1589 to 1934.

Of the numerous local scholars, many have given their works or notes assembled in the course of their work. Note the work of the great traveller and lecturer Gabriel De Beugny d`Hagerue (1831-1922). He was the author of the *Roman d`un Jesuit* (1882) and *Secret de Rose*. He published numerous texts, among them, *Les memoires d`un commis-voyageur* and *Recits Andalous*, concerning the events which took place in Andalusia between 1796 and 1845. Note also, the works of Eugene de Sars (1838-1909), poet and musician. He was the author, notably of *Au gres des vents* (1886). Lucien Baudens (1804-1857) was a celebrated military surgeon and a member of the Council of Health in 1853. He gave the Bibliotheque his *Relation de l`expedition de Constantine* (1838).

The old holdings of the Bibliotheque offer a vast resource to researchers, students, and readers who can make use in their place of reference works and precious editions.

If the development of the public lecture is today the primary mission of the Municipal Bibliotheque, the conservation, development, and the extension of the holdings of local history must not be neglected.

This rich heritage encourages the mounting of exhibitions, the organising of conferences by the Bibliotheque in conjunction with the Office of Tourism

and the associations which protect the heritage of the Town.

**Address :**

Hotel de ville, Passage des Hallettes, 03.21.95.40.42

**Curator :** Veronique Goblet

v.goblet@ville-airesurlalys.fr - biblio.airesurlalys@wanadoo.fr

**Opening hours :**

Tuesdays and Wednesdays 9.00 am to 12.00, Thursdays 9 am to 12.00 and 2.00 pm to 6 pm.

Entry free - consultation in the bibliotheque of the ancient archives, contemporary, and modern.

**Charge :**

genealogical research : 4.30 euros

**Selected activities :**

Introduction to the " Antenne " AGP (Geneological Association of the Pas-de-Calais, the fourth Saturday of each month, 2.30 pm to 5.00 pm (the archives concerning the civil administration of neighbouring communes are available).

Organisation of exhibitions for heritage days (topics chosen by the DRAC mid-September).



[Text Veronique Goblet, Municipal Reference Library]