

The Watergate of Beaulieu of Aire-sur-la-Lys



The Beaulieu gate is the fortified entrance of the River Lys at Aire.

It comes into the town from the west by an underground water course, fifty metres long. It opens up to pass through a fortified brick structure. Its present character results from various works undertaken throughout the course of centuries.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century the entry of the Lys was guarded by two towering strong points which formed part of the town walls (album de Croy, volume XVII). Their bases were in the exterior ditch.

In the same century, Philippe II of Spain reduced the height of the towers by half, gave the encircling wall a thickness of five metres, and built a modern bastion to protect the entry.

Vauban perfected a defensive system whereby Aire was deliberately surrounded by floodwater from the Lys. He controlled the river and a feeder stream, the Servoir, by a system of water gates surmounted with pepper pot towers known as "dames" which acted as markers. One can still see the "double dame" built on the watercourse to the west of the Route Nationale.

In 1850, the arch at the entrance collapsed. The military engineer in charge

of the repairs decided against rebuilding the big, round arch and partly filled in the high chamber in the middle of the edifice. He replaced it with solid brickwork on a support in the middle of the river with two pointed, inclined (ogive) arches. The two water courses rejoined under the arch.

In 1893, the bastion was demolished. The entry gate of the Lys and the powder store behind it were the only surviving remnants.

The powder store had been built in the eighteenth century, recognisable today by its heavy buttresses and protective wall.

Recently, the municipality has overhauled and repointed the brickwork of the entry gate.

The Beaulieu gate and the bastion at Thiennes (below) are the only significant remains of the fortifications of the town.

