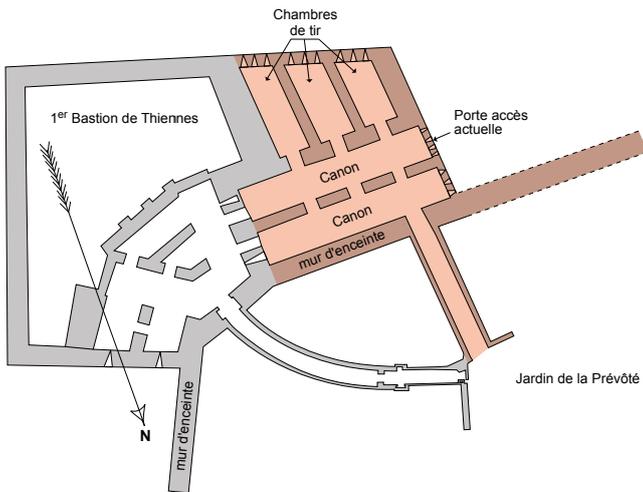


The bastion of Thiennes of Aire-sur-la-Lys



The bastion of Thiennes is to the east of the town, actually at Number 6c, Boulevard Foch.

Its name derived from the fact that it covered (in the military sense) the old road to the village of Thiennes.

It escaped the dismantling of the walls at the end of the nineteenth century and consists of two parts, built in different epochs, one an enlargement of the other. The older, the Bastion of the Canons, makes an angle with the pavement of the Boulevard Foch. It was built between 1520 and 1540 in the reign of the Emperor Charles V on the Italian model, probably by Jehan d`Aire (one of the famous and unfortunate burghers of Calais). At the same period, he was involved in the building of the Collegial Church. Access to the town was by an underground corridor (called the gorge or throat). It passed under the encircling wall and followed a curving line, 1.7 metres wide. The enlargement was built by Jean-Baptiste Gourdon and Charles Robelin, royal engineers, between 1685 and 1690. It was done so on the advice of Vauban who believed that the Bastion of Canons was too small. Demolished for the most part as a result of the siege of 1710, this part of the bastion was rebuilt by Charles Robelin after the occupation of the town by the Dutch between 1715 and 1720. More was built onto the western flank of the bastion in 1829 by the captain of engineers Charon. This opened up an interior means of communicating between the two parts. In 1850, the gate, three metres wide, gave access directly to the town.

To save the bastion from demolition, in 1896, two Airoise, Alcide and Abbel DELBENDE,

bought it for 16,000 francs and used the casements to store wine. A little later, the two parts were re-sold separately. In 1965 a private house was built on the old Bastion of Canons ; it may not be visited. The present owner opens the other part, locally known simply as " The Bastion ", to visitors on Heritage Days.

ORNAMENTATION

The older part of the bastion is characterised by its brickwork, its vaults in herring-bone pattern, and pointing whitened with chalk.

The later part contains two huge galleries, running parallel to each other on an east to west alignment. They served as a powder-house, as casemates for the soldiers, and housed the batteries which protected the ramparts and the ditches from the flank. Each of the galleries connected with the earlier fortifications through two openings.

Vertically above the galleries, three chambers housed cannons of lesser calibre, facing towards the south.

The openings for the cannons, notably those of the grand galleries, were provided with overhead conduits, like chimneys, to evacuate the fumes. The openings were flanked with two arrow slits which allowed the defenders to shoot while the cannons were re-loaded.

The bastion is no more than six metres high. Its ditch, however, is six metres further down. It was filled in during the dismantling of the walls between 1893 and 1896.

The opening towards the west with a grill was made by the Germans in 1943.

