

Panel 2 : Historic meeting point

Between the 12th and 14th centuries, nearly 400 fortified towns were created in the south of France. These were new towns, built to meet economic, military and political objectives. Some of them became important towns such as Libourne or Montauban, while others remained simple villages, and others still remained only projects and were never built.

The creation of the fortified town of Libourne took place against this background. Even though it meets the general objectives which define the creation of fortified towns, Libourne nevertheless retains certain special features.

1 The economic objective

Port activity has taken place in Libourne since the Gallo-Roman period. From the 11th century onwards, the emergence of large feudal states encouraged the revival of important trade networks, generating customs revenue for the nobles. Libourne in particular would benefit from this situation, as would Bayonne and Bordeaux, thanks to its direct access to the sea and to the commercial area formed by the King of England's lands. Since its creation, merchants of the fortified town took advantage of numerous tax exemptions.

Other privileges, such as exemptions from military service, the right to hold fairs and markets, and the right to form a commune, were also granted to the people of Libourne in order to attract as large a population of settlers as possible and to ensure that the new town would have an economic vitality which would strengthen the Duchy of Aquitaine.

The very ancient origins of the town make Libourne a very special fortified town since, unlike most of these urban creations, it was not an entirely new town, but the extension and integration of a pre-existing port village (called Fozera in the 12th century) within a much larger complex. The Fozera district, located near the confluence of the two rivers, has less regular streets preserved from Gallo-Roman times. These contrast with the grid arrangement of streets in the fortified town, which are organised around a central square lined with archways.

2 The political objective

Before the creation of the fortified town, the area around Libourne was part of the Viscounty of Castillon, a feudal domain whose seigneur had rebelled a few years earlier against the King of England, Henry III, who was also the Duke of Aquitaine. From then on, there was no longer any question of creating a fortified town with an important commercial centre and leaving it in the hands of nobles who were likely to revolt.

For this reason, when the fortified town was created, the area around Libourne was separated from the Viscounty of Fronsac and placed under the control of the King and his heirs in perpetuity. Governance of the town was under the authority of a mayor and a town council (or jurade) whose members were elected by the bourgeoisie. The mayor of Libourne and the jurade were only accountable to the King or his representative. The absence of a seigneur therefore provided the people of Libourne with a guarantee of freedom and the King with a pledge of loyalty.

3 The military objective

<https://www.libourne.fr/confluente/panel-2-historic-meeting-point?>

There are several reasons why Libourne became a fortified town.

a/ From the outset, Libourne was destined to become an important commercial centre whose riches could, in times of trouble, arouse the envy of legitimate armies or bandits.

b/ The strategic position of Libourne on the border of the Duchy of Aquitaine and the lands of the King of France exposed it to military attacks. The proximity of Fronsac and the economic and strategic interest of its port were just some of the reasons to want to ensure its control. In this respect, the foundation of Libourne was part of a defensive strategy in response to works carried out further east by Alphonse de Poitiers on behalf of his brother, King Louis IX.

Even though the fortifications of Libourne were not completed until 50 to 60 years after the foundation of the fortified town, their scale showed its importance. They covered an area of more than thirty hectares and consisted of an approximately 2.5 km long wall with towers and gates. By way of comparison, the town walls of Aigues Mortes were only 1.4 km long.



HOTEL DE VILLE

42 place Abel Surchamp
33500 Libourne

HORAIRES :
8h30 > 12h30
13h15 > 17h