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Welcome to château de Coussay

It is a private property, but you can walk around the moat respecting the places.

If you are accompanied by children, take care of them because they remain under your responsibility.

Dogs must be kept on a leash.

And of course, swimming is forbidden.

The origins of the priory of Coussay

In June 837, a priory was created at Coussay by King Louis the Pious who attributed it to the **Abbey of Cormery** near Tours. A community consisting of a few monks lived there and developed a farm. But gradually, the resources diminished and the Hundred Years War provoked widespread poverty in the countryside.

In 1338 only one monk was left along with the prior, and afterwards a vicar served the priory.

The construction of the priory château by Denis Briçonnet

In about 1520, **Denis Briçonnet** (1479-1535), Bishop of several dioceses (Toulon, St Malo, Lodève) and Prior of Coussay, « the three years of his ambassadorship having ended, and having come back to France to King François (1^{er}), was at Tours at his parents' house a few days later (...) and from there left to go to his Priory in Coussay in the Poitou region. The priory was under the authority of the Abbey of Cormery and while there, having considered the quality of the place very carefully, and having fallen in love with its beauty, he decided to have a manor built as his residence, and he made it so superb and magnificent that we hold it to be true that he spent more than fifty thousand francs ; » (Guy Bretonneau, *Histoire généalogique de la Maison des Briçonnetts*, 1621)



Denis Briçonnet

As well as his ambassadorship to **Pope Leon Xth** (Jean de Medicis) which lasted three years, he had previously stayed in Italy several times, more particularly with his father **Cardinal Guillaume Briçonnet**. He came back heavily influenced by new architectural ideas (The Italian Renaissance) as well as new religious concepts (ideas of reform which originated in Milan)

That is how he had his manor built probably assisted by craftsmen from the construction site at the nearby **Chateau de Bonnavet** (St Martin-la-Pallu).

It consists of an Italian style villa but was built on a four turreted plan as in the XVth century, consequently **the priory of Coussay is one of the first châteaux of the French Renaissance.**

The Duplessis Family

Durant le règne de François 1^{er}, la famille Duplessis, habitant la terre voisine de Richelieu, se montre d'un dévouement inlassable. En récompense, le bénéfice du prieuré lui est accordé par le Roi vers 1543, et devient ensuite un bien héréditaire.

That is how **Armand-Jean Duplessis**, the future Cardinal Richelieu, inherited the property from his uncle when he had just been appointed Bishop of Luçon at the age of 22 (1607).

Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642)

He came to Coussay for the first time in 1608. In 1610 he took refuge here after his setback with the Queen Regent Marie de Medicis. Coussay was his favourite residence when he was away from Court. He prepared his political projects here all the while remaining in contact with his friends: Chasteignier de la Roche Posay, Bishop of Poitiers and his first vicar, and du Vergier de Hauranne, who both ensured his election as delegate of the clergy in the Estates General in 1614.

In November 1616 he was Secretary of State for War and Foreign Affairs. But **in April 1617** Concini, the controversial advisor to the Queen Mother, was assassinated. Richelieu was thrown out by Louis XIIIth. He went to Blois with the Queen Mother, then thought it wiser to take refuge in Coussay again, from where he worked hard to vindicate himself in Louis XIIIth's eyes, both directly and through Father Joseph, his « grey eminence ».

It was during this time in his « country home », that he took six weeks to write his book, « *Les Principaux points de la Foy en l'Eglise Catholique défendus contre l'escrit adressé au Roy par les quatre ministres de Charenton* », which he dedicated to the King. It was also at Coussay that he wrote most of « *L'Instruction du Chrétien* ».

In April 1618, feeling he was in danger, he suggested he should be exiled. His exile was accepted and he left Coussay for Avignon on Good Friday. He reappeared in March 1619. During the successive reconciliations with the King and the Queen Mother, the latter even spent a few days at Coussay in June 1621. **In 1623**, absorbed in state affairs, he abandoned his Bishopric in Luçon and never came back to Coussay.

From Richelieu to the Revolution

When Richelieu died **in 1642**, in accordance with his demand, Coussay was given to the honourable Jean de Sazilly, his cousin. The latter lived here for about fifty years and gave many big parties. When Jean de Sazilly died priors stopped living in Coussay and the Abbey left the land and the château in the hands of a Farmer General.

From 1710 to 1791 four Farmer Generals in succession were in charge.

From the Revolution to the present day

The château was sold as national property at the revolution. But because the buyer turned out to be insolvent, Bonaparte took the château back as property of the senate. At the Restoration the château became property of the crown.

In 1830 it was sold to a local farmer.

From 1830 to 1903 it belonged to several owners, but it was solely used as a farm and a barn and consequently became more and more derelict.

In 1903 it was sold to Louis Tristant, a lawyer in Mirebeau, and great grandfather of the present owners. Louis Tristant carried out the essential work needed to save the roofs and roof timber.

In 1949 the façades and the roofs of the château, the moat and the turrets in each corner as well as Richelieu's oratory situated on the second floor of the donjon, were listed as historical monuments. With the help of the state, the first work on the roof was undertaken, mainly on the donjon. Then the northern turrets over the moat were repaired.

In 1989 the moat was cleaned out.

From 1989 to 2007, the restoration of the roof timbers and roofs of the main building and of the northern, western and southern towers was carried out. **From 2008 to 2012** a five-year programme to renovate the windows using leaded panes of glass and inside shutters was completed. All this work was carried out with the financial help of the DRAC Poitou Charentes and, in some cases, the Conseil Général de la Vienne.

The château as we see it today has been slightly modified: only the door of the North West façade and the stairs leading to it were added in the XVIIth century by Richelieu, and the second window (to the left of the door) which was added at the end of the XVIIIth century.

