



THE CHATEAU OF COUSSAY

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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.



At the beginning of the XVIth century Denis Briçonnet, Prior of Cormery, Bishop of Saint Malo and Lodève, "decided to build a mansion there that would be superb and magnificent". Because Denis Briçonnet spent several years in Rome as extraordinary ambassador of François Ist to Pope Leon Xth, the château bears the mark of the Italian Renaissance.



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.

During the reign of François Ist the **Duplessis family**, who lived in nearby Richelieu, showed great devotion to the King. As a reward the family were given the Priory by the King in about 1543 and it consequently became part of the family's property. That is how Armand 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).

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 XVIth century by Richelieu, and the second window to the left of the door which was added at the end of the XVIIIth century.

*In 2015, the château of Coussay took part in the 500th anniversary celebrations:
« 1515-2015 François 1^{er}, la Renaissance en val de Loire ».*

Cardinal Richelieu

He came to Coussay for the first time in 1608. In 1610 he took refuge here after his setback with the Queen Regent. 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 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, and 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.

Welcome to the Château of Coussay which is private property.

If you wish you may walk around the moat. Children are the responsibility of the adults accompanying them and we should be pleased if you would respect the environment.