

The Mailly Tower

Saint-Léger-aux-Bois



Frontal view © Département de la Seine-Maritime

The area surrounding Saint-Léger-aux-Bois is dominated by the church dedicated to Saint Léger and the Tour de Mailly, and both built in the 16th century by the lord of the district, Adrien de Mailly.

The 11th-century lord of Saint Léger campaigned alongside William the Conqueror. The family line died out in the 15th century due to having no male heirs, and their lands handed to the Bailleul family.

In 1503, the title passed to a family of noble knights originally from Picardy, named Mailly, through the marriage of Adrien de Mailly to Françoise de Bailleul, daughter of Jacques de Bailleul, Lord of Saint-Léger, and Jeanne of Haucourt & Quesnoy-en-Vimeu.

The area of Saint-Léger remained in the Mailly-Haucourt family until 1809 when Antoine Lemire purchased them.

According to a Napoleonic cadastral plan dated 1823, the tower stood at the entrance to a large courtyard surrounded by the buildings which nowadays belong to a working farm. The courtyard was most likely the hub of the seigniorial estate, also containing a well, dovecote and the manor house which was destroyed during the Revolution.

In publication named *Répertoire archéologique*, a certain Father Cochet alluded to a château, of which only "...a 16th-century farmhouse and high red-brick tower called le Tour des Mailly..." remain. The tower is sometimes called the Tower of the Dukes of Mailly, although none of the family was ever a duke.

Nearby the estate is the church, whose choir chapel now serves as a sacristy. It was built, however, for Jacques de Bailleul in 1510 and gave the lord direct access to the church from what was his private chapel via a side door that has long since been blocked up.



Napoleonic cadastral plan (section B), 1823, ADSM 3P32906 © Département de la Seine-Maritime

The tower fell into disuse in the late 19th century and was converted into lodgings early in the following century. It underwent significant architectural changes, including the addition of a ground-floor doorway out onto the road. A rather distinctive half-timber and brick house presumably built in the 18th century still adjoins the tower today.

In the second half of the 20th century, the SIVOM acquired the tower and turned it into a tourist office. The commune then bought the building in 2003 and renovated the roof and mullions. After hosting the visiting local authority library, the tower became an exhibition space for the church's 500th anniversary commemoration celebrations.

The tower stands like a solitary guardian at the entrance to the seigneurial seat. It is built in red brick, with four storeys including the loft.

Although it boasts certain military architectural features, it is first and foremost an ornamental tower. The false stone and, in some places, brick machicolations are decorative rather than defensive, as there is no rampart. The tower has sizeable stone-quoined mullion windows, all facing west. The current doorway is relatively modern and is in the place of a former window. The traces of the original door are visible on the north side of the tower. The number and shape of the openings preclude the defensive nature of the tower.



False machicolations © Département de la Seine-Maritime

The uppermost storey has two windows, facing north and south, with two other bricked-up east-west openings still discernible from the inside.

The chimneys that the tower once possessed were demolished in the early to mid 20th century, although the fireplace surrounds remain on the upper floors. Only photographic evidence of their existence remains.



View of the tower with its chimneys. Pre-1940. Photo: Philippe Des Forts, historian, 1865-1940

To the west, a turret housing a spiral staircase provides access to the upper floors.

The various modern alterations have modified the ground floor, although a vaulted brick ceiling remains hidden behind the suspended ceiling. 16th-century architectural features are to be found on the other storeys. There is a hexagonal terracotta-tiled floor, a moulded door with original hinges and fittings, brickwork with painted joints and triangular joists, the remains of the original ceiling. By making comparisons to other, contemporary buildings, such as the Château de Martainville-Epreville, these elements allow for a precise dating to the late 15th to early 16th centuries.

On the second storey, a doorway that gave access to a watchtower is now obstructed by the adjoining house.



The tower's third storey: typical 16th-century architectural features © Département de la Seine-Maritime



Triangular joists © Département de la Seine-Maritime

The municipality built a modern steep wooden staircase to allow access to the attic, which has a wider circumference than the other levels and overhangs the crenellations.

The oak roof framework sits on top the walls and supported by wooden pillars, the whole depending on a central post for its strength. The structure is composed of three superimposed diagonal crosses that support a slate, long-gable pepper-pot roof. It is an exceptional example of the 16th-century carpenters' craftsmanship.



The roof structure is laid directly on the walls © Département de la Seine-Maritime



Underside view of the diagonal crosses © Département de la Seine-Maritime