

# *Sauveterre de Rouergue*

## *Discovering the Bastide*



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### **Historical Background**

At Pentecost 1281, Philippe Le Hardi, King of France decided to found the bastide of Sauveterre.

Real urbanization policy of the time, the creation of these new towns of the 13 and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, enabled a fast increasing population to settle down.

Moreover this movement gave the King the opportunity to strengthen his might and to weaken both ecclesiastical and feudal powers.

### **The foundation of the bastide**

Under the bayle's supervision and administered by the consuls who were elected by the inhabitants, the bastide was built like a housing estate. The central square was surrounded by nine plots of land to be built on. They were served by four main streets intersected by lanes. In the surrounding area, the gardens were integral part of the plots to built on.

Quickly, from the 1320s, fortifications enclosed the town.

The population, mainly from peasant stock, was confronted with the poor soil as the sloping land and the local lords prevented all opportunity of any expansion and agricultural development.

New economic activities were to be found...

Thus, the bastide would exist on craftsmanship and would become an administrative centre thanks to fiscal privileges provided by the King. Weavers, clothworkers, milliners, but also blacksmiths, knife-makers both stimulated local trade and exported their products. Covered walkways and shops were proof of the economic activity of the place.

In the meanwhile, the town was developing a structure and was organizing itself. Four consuls, one per borough ran the town ; they had powers to enforce law and order, they organized turns of duty and raised taxes. They were responsible for the school and for the hospital and were wardens of the Church...

Elected every year, on the day following Christmas, they came from the upper-classes. Clad in black robes trimmed with ermine and with a hat, one or two musicians rang the bell for their official events.

The town was a juridical district, stretching from the river Aveyron to the river Viaur. Royal justice was pronounced in Sauveterre.

### **Knife-making**

In the late Middle Ages, Sauveterre-de-Rouergue was the capital of knife-making in the Rouergue and a great centre of southern knife-making. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the craftsmanship was expanding fast thanks to the investments of merchants. Towards 1425, there were about 30 blacksmiths, 16 of whom used "tornhals" - grindstones - to sharpen.

Because of wars of religion, changes in commercial trends, deforestation and thus the lack of coal, epidemics may have been the reason for the decline of knife-making, already noticeable in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

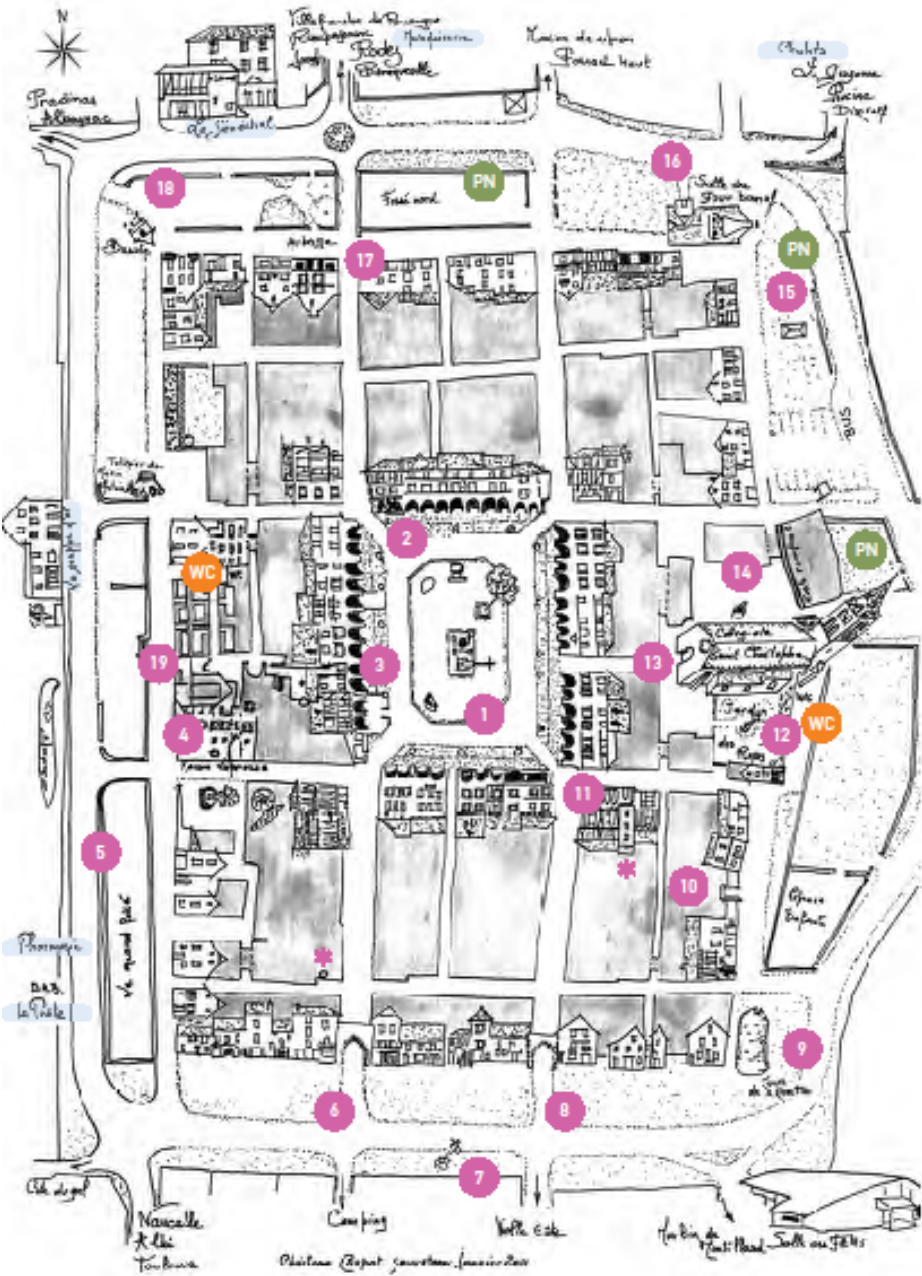
After centuries of absence and thanks to the "Atelier de Sauveterre"'s initiative, the village resumed this expertise.

### **Sauveterre today**

The municipality demonstrates a dynamism that allows it to maintain the activities and services necessary to the population. The elderly have the benefit of the retirement facility with medical support. Doctors, nurses and pharmacists back up the local medical assistance. The merchants, hotels and restaurants offer their services to residents, vacationers and tourists.

Arts and crafts are important for quality production in several fields: knives, leather goods, basketry, jewelry, stained glass, ceramics, paintings, crystal pearls, lighting.....

To accompany this economic development, an arts and crafts association has been created on the territory of the common community.



PN : aire de pique-nique WC : toilettes publiques

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**1- La place des arcades** : A rectangle, 60m long by 40m wide (that is to say a 39,000 feet area). The plaza is surrounded by arches or galleries called "chitats" formed by overhanging houses, for which they serve as porticoes. In the center of the square, the 14m-deep well, protected by the cross, was reshaped over time. These galleries were used as a hall for weekly fairs and markets of old. They now serve as a sheltered promenade. What was useful gave way to the aesthetics but its central position still testifies of its importance for the life of people in Sauveterre.

**2- Maison Unal** : One of the most beautiful examples of medieval architecture. Of note are the half-timbering, the cut stonework and the double corbelling.

On the right, **Maison Lacam**: Once salt cellar. House of J-F Magne, republican mayor, who was deported in Algeria in 1851, where he died.

**3- Hôtel de ville** : Town hall: A typical example of the houses bordering the square which are divided into two main parts by an interior courtyard providing ventilation and sunlight. This curious yard is adorned with a corridor of barrel and cross-vaulted ceilings, the later supported by carved stones. It is the only indoor that can be visited out of all the houses on the square. In the inner courtyard you can see an adjoining well, witness of the life in community in the bastide. The corridor is decorated with sculptures (bull head, human face). A fresco made by the "companions" decorates the access to the first floor.

**4- Maison Dalmas-Resseguier** : Presently, the presbytery. On the facade, to the left, can be seen the coat of arms of this illustrious family from which will issue the famous navigator De Lapérouse. To the right, the D'Estaing family's coat of arms. Today, this renovated building and the adjoining buildings are home of the Laperouse space dedicated to various artists.

**5- Fossé** : Moat: The only vestige still containing water of the former moat which once surrounded the Bastide.

**Puits de Brassat**: Its remarkable architecture shows its importance. The shutter which you can observe behind all the mechanisms was a privileged access reserved for the owner of the house against which it is situated. The presence of two mechanisms testifies of the evolution in the system used to drain the wells.

**6- Porte St Christophe** : Saint Christophe porch-way: This gate was formerly crowned by machicolation. The outer face is adorned by a 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century pointed arch. Inside, a niche contains a Renaissance statue of Saint Christophe, patron saint of the village, flanked by two other statues less well preserved.

**7- Croix de la Mérette** : Merette cross: a sandstone cross (16<sup>th</sup> century). North face: Christ on the cross flanked by the Virgin and St John. South face, the Virgin and Child with St Christopher and St Jacques and St Loup, patron saints of Jouels.

**8- Porte St Vital** : Saint Vital porch way: Second south door of the city, we can see St Vital's bust, first patron saint of the city.

**9- Tour de la Mérette** : Saint Vital porch way: Second south door of the city, we can see St Vital's bust, first patron saint of the city.

**10- Ancien hôpital** : Place of Old hospital. In **St-Christophe street**, a bas-relief represents Ste Valérie and her child carrying a jar of water to her husband St Vital

**11- Maison Lemonnier** : Lemonnier House. Another beautiful example of half-timbered architecture. Lovely sculptures on the beams. In the extension, the **Heritage House** offers a summer exhibition and a historical library. .

**12- Ancien cimetière** : former cemetery : There is a cross that probably dates from the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. The cemetery has been changed into a rose garden and various stone relics are displayed there. See a stone with incipations in Latin.

**13- Collégiale St Christophe** : Collegial church: Built in the pure "méridional gothic" style. The bell tower is the biggest tower of ford in the city.

**14 - Puits de la place de la Caminade** : Its semi-circle shape closed by a stone of support is typical of the wells of Sauveterre. The stone of support still possesses marks of wears due to the friction of the rope hoisted to raise the bucket, showing of the hardness of the task.

**15- Travail à ferer** : Place to shoe the cow and the steer, date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**16- Four banal** : Communal oven where each household used to bring the bread to be baked.

**17- Rue St Jean** : On this end of the town, the only draw-bridge.

**18- Bascule** : Built on the place of one of the towers.

**19- Espace Lapérouse** : the area, developed in 2009, encompasses several buildings: the Dalmas-Resseguier home to the south, the former convent to the north and newly built workshops. It is the headquarters of the artisans and craftsmen. The Tourisme Office is located there. The winecellar under the latter office shows that wine was being produced at the bastide was founded.