



## Exploring History: Medieval to Modern 1400 – 1900

*Palais Jacques Coeur: layout*

### **Narrator**

Coeur wasn't of noble birth but was ennobled by the king. Part of his new lifestyle was having a suitably grand mansion that everybody could see. Coeur picked a prestigious site to erect his mansion by building along 300 foot of the fourth century Gallo-Roman wall that encircled the town of Bourges.

The highly decorated façade looks out onto the town, impressing passers-by. While contemporaries approaching Bourges from fields to the west would have seen the back of the house with its imposing towers and crenellations. Both are symbols of noble power in the late middle ages.

Coeur's wealth is obvious from the sheer size of the building and also in the choice of building materials. At a time when most houses were built of wood and plaster, Coeur's mansion was built from stone. Although building records have not survived, the cost of transporting the stone from local quarries in addition to wages for the builders was enormous.

Medieval visitors to the mansion entered through the main gateway into the principal courtyard.

The many windows were another sign of wealth as glass was expensive to produce. Most windows at the time were made from animal skins or had wooden shutters.

A visitor would have gained an idea of the layout of the building by looking at the sculptures over the doorways around the courtyard.

Directly across the courtyard the entrance to the great hall is marked out by its wealth of decoration, both on the tower and on the door surround.

The doorway to the kitchens is indicated by a sculpture of domestic chores.

Over the chapel staircase are scenes showing preparations for religious services. A figure rings a bell summoning the worshippers to prayer.

The mansion is built over three storeys and has extensive cellars underground.

The ground floor is broadly divided into covered galleries, domestic areas including kitchen and steam room, a great hall, and what were probably living quarters. The small octagonal towers house staircases to the upper floors.

The first floor comprises the chapel over the gateway, flanked on either side by galleries.

Directly above the great hall on the ground floor is an upper great hall. On both sides are a series of rooms, which may have been Coeur's private apartments and offices.

On the second floor is another great hall, directly above the halls on the lower floors.

It's not possible to identify what all the rooms would have been used for. But the size and decoration of some of them gives clues as to their function during Coeur's lifetime.

On the ground floor in the lower great hall there are the remains of elaborate decoration on the walls, on the fireplace and above the doorway. The small gallery would have been used by musicians entertaining guests in the hall below.

There is a serving hatch between the great hall and the adjoining room. This suggests that food would have been brought up from the kitchens and kept here when Coeur was entertaining. Wine was brought up the stairs from the cellars.

The food for entertaining was prepared in the main kitchen. This room is no longer accessible.

Next door in the small kitchen the fire was used to heat the steam bath in the adjoining room.

The steam bath is a sign of luxury and comfort. This room is located off the staircase leading to the first floor

On the first floor is the medieval garderobe or toilet.

Nothing remains of the original decoration in the upper great hall but its dimensions and size of the windows give an idea of its original magnificence.

Corridors off the great hall lead to what may have been Coeur's private rooms.

Included in this is the galley room.

Directly opposite the great hall is the chapel where the whole household worshipped. On either side are little oratories where Coeur and his wife sat.

Galleries on either side of the chapel were probably used for exercise and leisure.

Unlike some of the other rooms the south gallery was well heated by these large fireplaces. A spiral staircase off the great hall on the first floor leads to the Tower rooms. On the second level is the Angel chamber, so called because of an angel sculpted above the fireplace. On the third level, and guarded by a reinforced door, is Coeur's treasure chamber. On the second floor of the building, under the roof, is another great hall, which may have been used as a reception room. This first look around the mansion has revealed some of Coeur's aspirations and ambitions in the layout and choice of material.