A castle in the making

Deep in the forests of northern Burgundy, in a once disused quarry, a team of master-builders is building a 13th-century castle from scratch. Quarrymen, stonemasons, woodcutters, carpenter-joiners, blacksmiths, tile makers, carters and rope makers are working together to revive heritage craft skills and to shed light on the world of medieval construction.

Guédelon, the ultimate in grand design

Throughout the seasons, Guédelon's workers rise to the extraordinary challenge of building a castle from scratch. Visitors from across the globe have witnessed the building of the curtain walls, the Great Hall’s roof timbers, the antechamber and its mural paintings, the castle kitchen and storeroom, the rib-vaulted guardrooms and the crenelated wall-walk, on this, the only construction site of its kind in the world.

In 2016, the masons will continue working on the western corner tower, the western curtain wall and the Chapel Tower. Decorative wall paintings will be applied to the chapel’s walls. On the eastern curtain wall, the carpenters will assemble the temporary wooden bridge; they will use this structure to deliver the oak beams which will form the towers’ roof timbers.

Guédelon, illuminating the Middle Ages

It is impossible to visit medieval castles and cathedrals without wondering how these buildings were constructed, where the materials came from, how they were transported, which tools were used or how such heavy loads were hoisted. Guédelon sheds light on these mysteries of the medieval world.

Guédelon, learning from experience

At a time when environmental protection is of such concern, Guédelon provides practical lessons in sustainable building. This pioneering construction site offers information on wattle-and-daub or rubble walling; making and using limewashes; firing and making traditional terracotta roof tiles; splitting oak shakes; making flax and hemp ropes. Inspired by the past, this building site is also of great relevance to the 21st century.
Guédelon, an act of folly

An archaeological study at Saint-Fargeau Castle revealed that a medieval stone fortress was hidden within its red brick walls: the idea of building a castle from scratch was born. Before the dream could become a reality, there was much work to be done: a site had to be found, the local authorities had to be brought onboard, planning permission had to be obtained, the first members of the construction team had to be recruited. The dream was to build a castle as it would have been in the Middle Ages: an idea which some found mildly amusing, and others dismissed as outright folly. The site - in the heart of Guédelon forest - was found: a site which offered all the resources necessary for the building of a castle: a stone quarry, an oak forest, quarry sand, clay and a water supply.

Guédelon, a shared passion

Today, Guédelon employs 70 people, of whom 35 work on the building site itself. Some were already qualified; others have acquired their skills on site. In transforming the site’s wood, stone and clay, the Guédelon team are reviving forgotten skills and raising the status of traditional heritage crafts. At Guédelon, the ability to talk to the visiting public about the skills used in different heritage crafts is just as important as mastering the crafts themselves.

Guédelon, be part of the adventure

Each year, around 650 people choose to play an active role in the venture and learn more about the building techniques used on site. From a wide range of backgrounds – castle enthusiasts, complete novices eager to learn, or work-experience students – for a period of several days, they step into the shoes of a medieval master-builder. The site is overseen by Florian Renucci, the master mason. He is responsible for the day-to-day running of the site and, along with the project's managers, ensures that the work carried out is as historically, architecturally and archaeologically accurate as possible.
**Guédelon, experimental archaeology in action**

Our task is to recreate the construction techniques and the logistical organisation of an early 13th-century building site. We base much of our work on medieval financial records, illustrations on illuminated manuscripts, stained-glass windows and evidence from contemporary chroniclers. These sources provide us with an insight into the tools used and the building techniques employed. However, in order to ensure that our working practice matches as closely as possible that of the 13th century, the project's founders and the master-mason, insist upon the need to closely examine a number of existing castles: these 13th-century castles are the last reliable witnesses left to us by history. Once examined, photographed and measured, their evidence helps us to avoid committing unnecessary errors which would later need correcting. This way of working has allowed us to reveal some of the medieval castle-builders' fascinating secrets. Among the castles which serve as models are Ratilly (89), La Motte-Josserand (58), Dourdan (91) and Yévre-le-Châtel (45).

**Guédelon, living history**

Every day, the site attempts to resolve some of the many questions still unanswered regarding 13th-century castle construction. The serious nature of the project demands the involvement of the academic world, and our work is monitored by both archaeologists and historians. Their involvement is of mutual benefit: they provide the project with invaluable information, while in turn, they have the unique opportunity to observe a team of builders at work on a medieval building site. They can study the skills employed, how tools are handled, and how the site is organised.

The Guédelon advisory committee is comprised of:
Anne Baud: archaeologist and lecturer at Lyon 2 University
Jacques Moulin: head architect at Monuments Historiques - draughted the original plans for Guédelon Castle
Nicolas Reveyron: art historian and lecturer at Lyon 2 University
Nicolas Faucherre: archaeologist, art historian and fortification specialist
Christian Corvisier: architectural historian
Frédéric Epaud: archaeologist and CNRS researcher at Tours, medieval roof timber specialist
A shared passion

Guédelon, passing on knowledge
Unlike any other present-day building site, Guédelon warmly welcomes members of the public. The workers demonstrate and explain, to a wide audience, the skills of our forefathers.
Stone quarrying, building vaulted ceilings, blacksmithing, raising roof timbers, making fired earth tiles and using medieval lifting machinery are just some of the activities which visitors can witness at first hand during a visit to Guédelon. The workers are always on hand to talk about their craft and the castle's progress.

Guédelon, where history comes to life
Each year, 50,000 children visit Guédelon with their schools. The site is an excellent educational resource, bringing to life the history of the Middle Ages. Guided tours are tailored to the school curriculum and according to age groups: activity trails for primary school children, and interactive guided tours for secondary school children. Pupils of all ages have the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of medieval stonemasons by taking part in stone carving workshops or discovering the secrets of medieval master-builders at the geometry workshop.

Guédelon, a journey through time
In an area of outstanding natural beauty, this ever-changing site can be visited time and time again. Our visitors are intensely loyal and have a deep connection with the venture; they regularly return to follow the construction's progress. Each season, Guédelon welcomes some 300,000 visitors, including an ever-growing number of overseas visitors. Guided tours are available in French, English, German and Dutch.
In just a few short years, Guédelon has become one of France’s major tourist attractions. Employing 70 people, this venture, thanks to ticket sales and gift shop alone, is entirely self-financing.
The hydraulic flour mill

a new archaeological challenge

Guédelon’s woodsmen, carpenters, stonemasons and blacksmiths have built from scratch a working reproduction of a medieval hydraulic flour mill. This mill is the fruit of three years’ collaboration with archaeologists from Inrap: the French National Institute for Preventative Archaeological Research. It is based on the archaeological remains of a 12th-century water mill found in the east of France, at Thervay in Jura.

milling our daily bread

Just as in the building of the castle, all the different crafts on site worked together this time with the aim of producing the same type of flour made in the Middle Ages. Set in a woodland clearing, just a stone’s throw from the construction site, you can now visit this working, flour-producing mill. Our baker offers you the chance to taste bread made with Guédelon-ground flour, baked in the castle’s bread oven.

a long-term partnership with Inrap

After the success of the mill project, we renewed our collaboration with Inrap in 2015 with the building of a working lime kiln. This latest challenge allows us to obtain slaked lime, the essential material in all medieval construction, and allows the archaeologists unique insights into medieval lime production. Experimental firings will continue in 2016.
The carpenters will be bridging the gap

On the eastern curtain wall the woodsmen and carpenters will build a temporary wooden bridge which will span the deep ditch and which will allow them to deliver all the timber needed to build the towers’ roof timbers.

In 2016, the masons are heading west!

On the western corner tower they will build a shooting gallery and a pigeon loft in this tower. They will crown the Chapel Tower with a crenellated parapet. Using the palette of colours produced from the site’s ochres and hematites, the painters will decorate the walls of the chapel.

Guédelon completed...

© Jean-Benoît Héron

The Chapel Tower

Chapel Tower

Great Tower

temporary bridge

eastern corner tower

western corner tower

© Denis Gliksman

Building programme 2016
For more information

Books about Guédelon in English

Guédelon: A Castle in the Making, Maryline Martin and Florian Renucci, Ouest France
Based on the experiments on the Guédelon medieval construction site, this book reveals the secrets of medieval master-builders and sheds light on the work of the various trades associated with castle-construction.

Guédelon: How to Build a Castle, éditions Guédelon

Guédelon: Fact File, éditions Guédelon

Guédelon, Fanatics for a Fortress, Philippe Minard, Aubanel

The Guédelon film rewarded at Cannes
The film tracing the building of the largest of Guédelon's vaults was awarded a Silver Dolphin at the 2012 Cannes Corporate Media and TV Awards. Built during the site's 13th and 14th seasons, the construction secrets of Guédelon Castle's largest vault are revealed in this unique document. This film approaches architecture from an entirely new angle and plunges, along with the craftsmen, into the magic of this fascinating and inspiring construction site.
Documentary film directed by Benoît Millot. Length: 33 mins. DVD All zone RRP €10

www.guedelon.fr

Our website receives 800,000 hits a year with 3,500,000 pages viewed.
The Facebook page launched in April 2011 has 43,000 fans and is gaining new followers daily.

We tweet in English from our Twitter account @GuedelonCastle
Practical information

How to find us

Guédelon is situated in the département of Yonne, in north-west Burgundy between the villages of Saint-Saveur-en-Puisaye and Saint-Amand-en-Puisaye. We are 2 hours south of Paris, 1 hour 45 minutes from Orleans, 2 hours from Dijon, 1 hour 20 minutes from Bourges.

Guédelon Route départementale 955 89520 Treigny - France
Tel: +33 3 86 45 66 66 guedelon@guedelon.fr

Opening times

The site is open from March 14th to November 1st 2016
For all our dates and opening times: www.guedelon.fr

Guided tours

Unguided or guided tours (French, English, German and Dutch speaking guides available)
Beginners’ stonemasonry and clay workshops available for adults and children.
Events at Guédelon: firing of clay tiles, demonstrations of medieval cuisine, tours of the site with Guédelon’s master-mason...
Event dates available on www.guedelon.fr

For individuals:
entrance fee: ticket office price €14/adult and €11/child (5-17 yr)
online ticket €12/adult and €10/child (5-17 yr)
Family pass: only available online
2 adults + 2 children (5-17 yr): €39
Book tickets, guided tours and workshops on www.guedelon.fr (recommended) or on site (subject to availability).
Restaurant services available at on-site tavern.

Contacts presse

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Guédelon on the BBC

Secrets of the Castle

In 2014, Guédelon was the subject of Secrets of the Castle with Ruth, Peter and Tom. This 5-part BBC documentary series, produced by the team behind the hugely successful Victorian Farm series, was broadcast before Christmas 2014 on BBC Two. The series attracted an audience of 11 million in the UK. It was subsequently broadcast in over 100 countries, including the USA, Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand: http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04sv5nc.

Turning back the clock

Historian Ruth Goodman and archaeologists Peter Ginn and Tom Pinfold worked alongside the Guédelon team for 5 months, to turn the clock back to learn the skills of medieval castle builders. During their season at Guédelon they learned to build a spiral staircase, explored how castles were defended, uncovered the surprisingly colourful world of medieval interior design and helped construct a spectacular limestone window.

The world’s biggest archaeological experiment

“Guédelon is the world’s biggest experimental archaeological site – and some would say the most ambitious too. I hope the TV series we have created together does justice to their extraordinary undertaking.”

David Upshal, Executive Producer, Lion Television.

Creating a storm on Twitter

“Secrets of the Castle on iPlayer is BRILLIANT. Get it watched.”

“Secrets of the Castle was the best thing on any TV station, sat or terrestrial, all year. Please make another series or follow-up”

“Please, @BBCTwo let us have more Secrets of the Castle! We're dying to see what happens next at @GuedelonCastle”