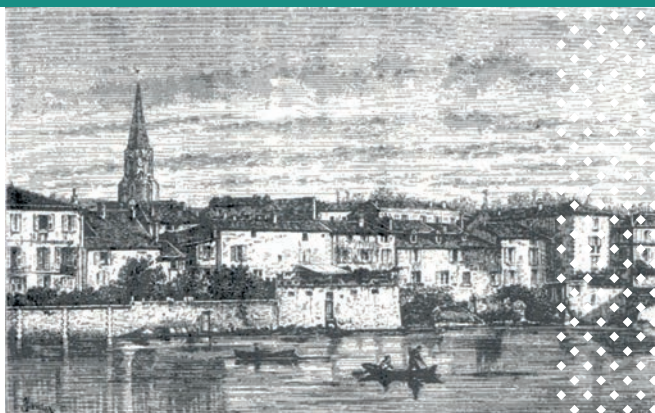


# JOURNEY THROUGH CONFOLENS



VILLES  
& PAYS  
D'ART &  
D'HISTOIRE

**Cover page:**

Engraving of Confolens dating from 1888.

© Charente County Archives.

View of Saint-Maxime quarter from the Pautrot dock - right bank.

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**1. The Vienne plays a decisive role in the constitution of the town. This is a view of the Pont Vieux and the Saint-Maxime quarter, on the right bank.**

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**2. The Napoleonic cadastral plan, held in the Charente County Archives, shows how the town lies at the confluence of the Vienne and the Goire.**

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# THE SHAPE OF A TOWN

**Confolens takes its name and its specific development from its position at the confluence.**

## **A BORDER TOWN BOUND UP WITH ITS RIVER**

Confolens lies in the enclosed valley of the Vienne, at the confluence of the Vienne and the Goire. This strategic location ensured good control of the water and the surrounding area. The quarters of the town grew up around these rivers.

Confolens stood at the boundary between two dioceses (Limoges on the right bank, Poitiers on the left bank) and two linguistic zones (langue d'oc (Occitan) to the east, langue d'oïl to the west). From the outset, the Vienne acted both as a link and a barrier between the quarters and the inhabitants.

## **A TOWN WITH A MEDIEVAL LAYOUT**

While some trace back the origins of the town to the Gallic period of antiquity, the first mention of Confolens in the texts back to the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

Attached to the principality of Chabanaais, Confolens consisted of three quarters organized around the Vienne : the Saint-Maxime quarter on the right bank, the Saint-Barthélemy quarter on the left bank and the Saint-Michel quarter on the heights of the town, following on from the Saint-Maxime quarter. Each quarter had a specific function. Thus, the Saint-Maxime quarter

was the political centre of the town where the buildings of power were concentrated : donjon, courtroom, etc. The Saint-Barthélemy quarter, designated as an outlying district, brought together the artisanal and commercial activities such as the tanneries. Finally, the Saint-Michel quarter, with the chapel of Commanderie, was considered as a succursal of the parish of Saint-Maurice-des-Lions. The Saint-Maxime and Saint-Barthélemy quarters were fortified in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively. The Vienne is a decisive element in the organisation of the town. Bringing economic and security benefits, it imposes its law on the town, to the rhythm of its waters in spate and the physical constraints of development. The river used to be crossed by a ford, now identifiable thanks to a town gate, then by the Pont Vieux constructed in the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

This bridge carried all the commercial traffic and led, in turn to the rise of certain streets : the Grand'Rue (now the Rue du Soleil) in the Saint-Maxime quarter, the Fontorse and the adjacent streets in the Saint-Barthélemy quarter.

## **URBAN EXPANSION IN THE 15<sup>TH</sup> AND 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES**

In this period, Confolens enjoyed relative





economic prosperity. The extensive stock farming led to the development of the great markets and the tanneries. They were built along the Vienne on the Saint-Barthélemy side as well as along the Goire outside the Saint-Maxime ramparts.

It was during this period of prosperity that were built most of the half-timbered houses of the town. Leading citizens also constructed buildings that highlighted new architectural forms (cross-windows and mullions) as well as new materials such as the ochre limestone from Pressac. These buildings include features inspired by seignorial halls (external or partially external staircase towers) whose aim was to testify to the social position of the patrons.

This development of new constructions was common to the Saint-Maxime and Saint-Barthélemy quarters. Although very prolific, this urban expansion remained mainly confined within the medieval ramparts.

### THE 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY OR THE BEGINNING OF THE EXTENSION OUTSIDE THE WALLS

Attacked several times by Protestant troops during the Wars of Religion, Confolens was affected by the Counter-Reformation and its physical reflection on the ground : the installation of religious communities and the construction of convents. Thus the town

corporation, through donations of leading citizens, supported the construction of the Recollects convent in 1616 and then the convent of the order of St Clare in the late 1630s. A third foundation, that of the hospital of the Sisters of Charity, appeared at the end of the 1660s. Whereas the convent of the order of St Clare and the hospital of the Sisters of Charity were built in the ramparts of the Saint-Barthélemy and Saint-Maxime quarters, the Recollects convent was built outside the walls on virgin land. It was the first significant building constructed outside the medieval ramparts. It opened the way to the establishment of other buildings outside the ramparts in increasing numbers between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Consideration was then given to the question of spaces available within the ramparts.

### THE DEMOLITION OF THE MEDIEVAL FORTIFICATIONS

The 18<sup>th</sup> century clearly addressed the problem of fortifications and the relevance of keeping them or destroying them. This « emancipation » movement was common to the entire kingdom of France. Thus it was that in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Confolens embarked on a massive campaign of destruction of the fortifications. The

**1. The chapel of Commanderie, which dates from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, is one of the iconic buildings in the Saint-Michel quarter.**

© CLCC.

**2. The Balaam house, located in Bournadour street, is an example of the building with a partially external staircase tower.**

© CLCC.

**3. The former convent of the order of St Clare, although enlarged, has a quadrangular layout with its four buildings set round the old cloister.**

© CLCC.



ditches in the Saint-Maxime quarter were filled in between 1750 and 1760, leading to the creation of the Rue des Buttes. Those of the Saint-Barthélemy quarters filled in during the 1770s and made way for the Blossac esplanades, the name of the administrator or *intendant de la généralité* of the Poitiers administrative area which included Confolens at that time.

It was during the Revolution, especially in the years 1790-1791, that all the gates of the town were demolished. Two gates, however, avoided destruction on the Saint-Maxime side : the *porte du Gué* which was no longer considered as a gate to the town and the so-called *Porte de Ville*, which was actually a gate in the castle surrounding wall set between other buildings.

## THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY : A NEW URBAN PHYSIOGNOMY

It was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the town underwent major modifications in its layout. The starting point of this transformation was the raising of Confolens into a sub-prefecture. Thereafter, Confolens set up institutional buildings linked to its new status : the sub-prefecture (1853), the prisons (1857-1859), the courthouse (1868).

The town layout was modified with the

creation of new streets or the widening of existing ones. In so doing, the town participated in a national movement of urban redevelopment linked to a determination to improve traffic and public health. These redevelopments were to be taken in association with the construction of two new bridges : the Pont Larréguy over the Goire in 1840 and the Pont Neuf or Pont Babaud- Laribièrre over the Vienne between 1848 and 1849. Thus, the construction of the Pont Larréguy entailed the opening of a new street, the Rue du Pont Larréguy, and the realignment of facades in part of the Grand'Rue (now Rue du Marquis Foch). The construction of the Pont Neuf was accompanied by an extension of the Rue du Collège (now Rue Emile Roux) on the Saint-Maxime side and the redevelopment of the Rue des Portes d'Ansac on the Saint-Barthélemy side.

At the confluence of the Goire, the Saint-Maxime cemetery was moved towards the outskirts and the land vacated was used for the construction of the first abattoir in the town in 1851-1852. The present Place Henri Coursaget was remodelled and enlarged during the construction of the covered market between 1892 and 1894.

Finally, the industrial revolution left its mark on the town, especially in the Saint-Barthélemy quarter, with the construction of the station in 1887 and the railway line linking Angoulême to l'Isle-Jourdain.



### THE EXTENSION OF THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE TOWN

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the urban fabric of Confolens, like other French towns, developed in its outskirts. A new abattoir was built around 1920 on the Saint-Barthélemy side, in the extension of the Rue de la Gare.

While some buildings were constructed within the perimeter of the historic quarters, such as the Noël-Noël college in the 1960s, most were built in the outskirts, like the Emile Roux high school in 1973. The present abattoir, situated at the edge of the town, was constructed in the late 1960s to replace the building dating from the 1920s. Several housing estates were created in the 1960s and 1970s ; they were followed by the creation of commercial and industrial zones at the north (Poitiers road) and south (Limoges road) entrances of the town.

This densification of the outskirts continued through several major buildings projects : the employment office, the new gendarmerie, the EHPAD residential care home for the elderly, the new hospital. These different establishments constitute a health center outside Confolens, on the road of Limoges. At the turn of the 2020s, a senior village project completed the densification of the health center.

Safeguarded as part of a ZPPAU (architectural and urban heritage protection zone) since 1993, the historic quarters will be soon included in a SPR (remarkable heritage sector). This quality heritage, combined with a dynamic cultural policy, enabled Confolens to obtain the label « Small City of Character » in 2015.





1. Like most mails (wide treelined pathways often situated on the site of the old ramparts or ditches), the Blossac esplanades were a pleasant setting for a stroll. The trees which lined it have now disappeared

© Private collection.

2. The Porte de la Salle, wrongly called the gate to the town, communicated with the entrance to the castle surrounding wall and provided access to the town.

© Regional Cultural Inventory Service – Christian Rome / CLCC.

3. The Pont Neuf was built upstream of the Pont Vieux to facilitate communication between the two banks and regulate the increasing flow of traffic.

© CLCC.

4. Built in 2010, the gendarmerie is one of the recent buildings in the town. Located at the edge of the town towards Limoges, it stands out for its resolutely contemporary architecture.

© CLCC.





1. Although the donjon is in ruins, its silhouette still dominates the town of Confolens.

© CLCC.



2. Now a residential area, the *Rue du Soleil* (or Grand'Rue) was the main artery of the town from the Middle Age onwards.

© CLCC.



3. The *manoir des comtes* has carved decorations in the Renaissance style which reflect the status of its patrons.

© CLCC.

# THE TOWN OVER THE CENTURIES

**In turn part of a principality, a stronghold of barons and counts, it has been a sub-prefecture since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

## A COVETED REGION IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Mentioned for the first time in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Confolens was attached to the principality of Chabanais. This principality was constituted at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century at the expense of the County of La Marche, a province extending roughly from Guéret to Charroux, and the viscount of Limoges. On several occasions in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the counts of La Marche laid siege to the donjon of Confolens without success.

The political struggles seemed to subside in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Fortifications were built in the Saint-Maxime quarter in the 13<sup>th</sup> century : surrounding wall, town gates and « castle ».

The Saint-Barthélemy quarter was fortified by royal autorisation after 1469. Two fortified bridges were built in the Middle Ages : the Pont Vieux over the Vienne in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the Pont du Goire. In the absence of archives or the results of excavations on the medieval period, the history of the town remains fragmented. It seems that Confolens did not suffer during the Hundred Years' War, unlike the surrounding countryside or the abbey at Lesterps.

## THE 15<sup>TH</sup> AND 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES, TIMES OF PROSPERITY

This period represents a key step in the development and evolution of the town in more than one way.

At the political level, broke away from the principality of Chabanais and became a barony. This emancipation occurred when the lord of Chabanais, Jacques de Vendôme, died without heirs and his sister, Louise de Vendôme, married François de Ferrières in 1519 and brought the territory of Confolens in her dowry. Confolens left the de Vendôme family once and for all when it was sold in 1562 to Joachim de Châteauvieux.

At the economical level, Confolens depended on the rise of activities related to stock farming : the markets, butcheries and tanneries. As a sign that these markets were important, the town built a covered market facing the church in the Place du Minage (now Place Henri Coursaget). The very numerous tanneries were set up along the Vienne and the Goire. Some tanner families occupied a very important position such as the Babaud family. The first town houses appeared in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the Saint-Maxime quarter, most being situated near the Grand'Rue.



1



2

## THE REPERCUSSIONS OF NATIONAL POLITICAL INSTABILITY

The Wars of Religion halted the rise of Confolens for a time. The town was taken twice by the Protestants. Between April and October 1567, a company led by Caumont de Piles and Pardaillan attacked the town and pillaged it. In 1568, a new company took the donjon of Confolens. A garrison of 300 men, led by Puy-Vidal settled there. At that time, however, even though the donjon was in ruins and unable to hold out against a siege, it nevertheless remained a symbol of power, which explains the interest of the Protestants. On 10 October 1568, the Duke of Brissac, lieutenant of the Duke of Montpensier, drove the Protestants from Confolens. This troubled period came to a close with the stay of the Duke of Anjou in Confolens in February 1569. Confolens was also associated with the Great History of France during the reign of Louis XIII. In the year 1619, the king was not on good terms with his mother, Queen Marie of Médicis and he exiled her to the Château of Blois. These stains within the royal family created clans among the Great of the kingdom.

The Duke of Epemon, one of the most important figures of the French nobility, sided with the queen and organised a secret meeting to prepare the escape of Marie of

Médicis. This meeting, which brought together the lords of southern France (about 300 men), was supposedly held in a half-timbered house in the *Rue du Soleil*. While it seems that this meeting took place in a manor house in the vicinity, the event remained associated with this house, now called the house of the Duke of Epemon.

## THE POLITICAL TURNING POINT OF THE 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the barony of Confolens was under the control of Joachim of Châteauneuf. Knight of honour to Queen Marie of Médicis, he obtained from King Henry IV that the barony become an earldom in 1604.

Within the town of Confolens, Saint-Maxime quarter was organised as a corporation with the election of four, then three consuls for a period of two or three years. This mode of governance gave the right to vote to heads of families as well as to heads of trades colleges. This corporation is mentioned for the first time in 1596. The names of the consuls of 1614 are inscribed on a plaque set in the rampart of the castle surrounding wall, to the rear of the donjon.

The consuls played a decisive role in the establishment of the Recollects convent in





1. The tanners' quarter along the Goire is characterised by its half-timbered houses.

© Yann Bonnet / CLCC.

2. The Pinaguet house is one of the town houses from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It has a staircase tower and Pressac limestone is used in its construction.

© CLCC.

3. The Duke of Epéron, whose real name was Jean-Louis de Nogaret de la Valette, was notable the governor of the Angoumois.

© CCA16

4. Property of the town, this house is the meeting place of *les Amis du Vieux Confolens*.

© CLCC.

1616. And in 1658, it was they who asked the convent of the order of St Clare to ensure the education of the young girls of the district. The 17<sup>th</sup> century also saw the construction of new town houses. Some were built by tanner families such as the Babaud family.

## THE UPEHAVALS OF THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

The *élection* of Confolens was created in 1714 and incorporated into the *généralité* of Poitiers administrative area. The rôle of this subdivision of the *généralité* was to oversee the collection of the main tax : the *taille*.

During this same period, the barony of Champagne-Mouton, initially attached to the *élection* of Niort, came under the authority of that of Confolens. The *palais de l'élection*, consisting of a court and a prison, moved into a building at the corner of the present Place Henri Coursaget and the Rue de la Ferrandie. The consuls were abolished in 1764 and replaced by a mayor and municipal magistrates.

The Revolution also brought new administrative changes. In 1790, Confolens became the seat of one of the five districts that made up the department of Charente. In 1791, the commune was divided into two cantons (Confolens North and South) with the Vienne as boundary. Several buildings were sold as

national property or given other attributions : the Recollects chapel became the Temple of Reason, the Dassier des Brosses house a court, etc. Although poorly known, the revolutionary period does not seem to have affected the town.

## THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY OR THE CREATION OF THE SUB-PREFECTURE

When the districts disappeared in 1800, Confolens became the seat of the subdivision and obtained the status of sub-prefecture. The impetus of the various sub-prefects was decisive in the urban evolution of the town : modification of the layout with the creation of new streets, construction of works of art and institutional buildings (sub-prefecture, court, prisons, schools), introduction of the railway, etc. In particular, the workers of the national workshops were enlisted for the construction of the Pont Neuf between 1848 and 1849. This influx of workers led to a demographic peak of 3,113 inhabitants in 1851.

The tanneries, pillars of the local economy, disappeared in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some sites turned to other activities, like the mill at Puygrenier which became a straw paper mill. The markets reached their heyday with two marketplaces in the town : one near the church of Saint-Barthélemy and the other from the Place du Docteur Defaut to





the Place Saint-Michel. This century ended with the construction of a new covered market, the gasworks for the electrification of the town and the installation of the rainwater drainage system.

### NEW DYNAMICS TO FIND

The town was hit hard by the ravages of the First World War when the population fell to 2,551 inhabitants. The new abattoir was the main urban construction work in Confolens in the 1920s. At the same time, the prisons closed and passenger rail services ended in 1938. The Second World War saw the creation in Confolens of the Foch maquis, very active in 1943 and 1944, which took part in the liberation of the « *poche de Royan* » area in 1945.

The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the permanent closure of the railway tracks and their conversion into a tourist activity but also the development of the outskirts with the construction of housing estates and commercial areas.

The economic fabric of the town is based on agricultural activities and SMEs. Confolens, like many small towns, is experiencing the desertification of its centre where many

houses stand empty.

Despite the closure of the court in 2010, the town has retained many public services. Above all, it has been the scene of several major architectural projects such as the EHPAD (2013) and the new hospital (2015). For several years, Confolens has been the scene of major building rehabilitation and reassignment project, with the transformation of the former hospital into a complex combining luxury accommodation and a restaurant.

The mills of Puygrenier and La Roche have also seen the installation of micro hydroelectric power stations.



**1. The former Recollects convent has had many uses. Today, the chapel now houses the cinema. During renovation work in 2012, an ancient door was discovered.**

© CLCC.

**2. This 18<sup>th</sup> century building was the *palais de l'élection*. Despite many alteration, the building has retained its original openings on the ground floor.**

© CLCC.

**3. The facades in the Rue du Maquis Foch have been realigned as is shown by the form of the openings.**

© CLCC.

**4. The design of the sub-prefecture in Confolens is similar to many other buildings of this type. The courtyard facade is in cut Angoulême stone and the rear opens onto a large garden.**

© CLCC.

**4. The unusual architectural form of the abattoir has earned it the name of Casino. At one time transformed into a dairy, the building now houses the municipal workshops.**

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Servicel – Marc Deneyer / CLCC.



# SAVOURS AND SKILLS

**On the strenghts of its rural and craft roots, the town offers a mixture of local identity and traditions from around the world.**

## STOCK FARMING

Lying within two appellation zones, « *le veau limousin* » (Limousin veal) and « *Agneau Poitou-Charentes* » (Poitou-Charentes Lamb), more than half of the Confolens area is given over to meadows and livestock farming. This activity was at the heart of the development of the livestock markets and tanneries until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Livestock farming also determined the presence of an abattoir in the commune since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today, the abattoir remains a major economic player which has been recognized for the quality of its work, the establishment being classified category 1.

## THE IMPACT OF THE VINES

Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, wine growing occupied about 10 % of the area of the commune. While the phylloxera epidemic caused the disappearance of the vines, the activity still remains present in the landscape thanks to the vine growers' huts. The heritage inventory has identified about ten in the Saint-Michel district and on the slopes of the Goire valley. Used as shelters, sheds or store-houses, these cabins were built with care and resembled second homes. Now abandoned, they symbolise the link between the vine grower and his vines.

## A TOWN OF GRANITE

Confolens lies at the heart of the crystalline lands of the Massif Central, predominantly granite. The predominance of this granite in the subsoil is reflected in the building of the town which, regardless of the period, are mainly built of this material. The granite from this area, which is unsuitable for cutting, is used in the form of roughly-hewn blocks or *moellons*. Limestone is however used for decorative features, in particular limestone from Pressac, whose ochre notes attenuate down the inherent gray tones of the granite.

## THE TANNERIES

The tanneries developed in the Middle Ages in this land of stock farming. In Confolens, set up along the Vienne on the Saint-Barthélemy side and along the Goire. The development of this key economic activity also saw the creation of tanners' quarters with their half-timbered houses, tan mills and basins in the waterways. Condemned in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for causing nuisances and pollution, the tanneries went into decline from 1841 onwards and disappeared completely at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



**1. The predominance of stock farming is still very strong in Confolens. Breeders can market their products thanks to the presence of the abattoir in the commune.**

© Yann Bonnet / CLCC.

### THE MILLS

The dense hydrographic network of the area led to the construction of numerous mills, mainly for flour, oil and tan. There are at least seven mills in Confolens, mostly established along the Vienne. Some were originally converted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as the Puygrenier mill, transformed into a straw paper factory and the La Roche mill converted into a spinning mill. Today, the town has only three old mills : Puygrenier, La Roche and Goire.

### THE MARKETS

The markets, along with the tanneries, were pillars of economic life of the town from the Middle Ages onwards. They are another illustration of the predominance of stock farming in the region. In addition to the monthly market, there are large markets which take place once a year, such as Saint-Barthélemy in August and the Saint-Michel fair. While livestock may have lost its leading place in the monthly markets, they still remain an event in local life. The Saint-Barthélemy market, open to other stalls, has retained its original spirit by bringing together animals from local farms.

### THE CONFOLENS FESTIVAL

Created in 1958, the Confolens Festival of arts and traditions of the world is an internationally renowned event. Each year, during the second week of August, the Festival introduces the public to the traditions and folklore of countries around the world. Between dances, songs and events, the town beats to the rhythm of the world. Even today, Confolens Festival remains the high point of the summer season. It unites the population of Confolens and every year attracts music lovers and tourists from all over the world.



1. Occupied in turn by a cemetery, an abattoir and the war memorial, the Square Jules Halgand is one of the green spaces of the town. From here there is an excellent view of the Saint-Barthélemy quarter.

© CLCC.

2. Disused since the 1960s, the Goire mill (photo taken before restoration) is very well preserved thanks to the actions of Mr Queriaud (former owner) and the commune (present owner).

© CLCC.

3. A rare example of the Renaissance period, the *Manoir des Comtes* has a magnificent straight interior staircase.

© CLCC.





# FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER

**From the donjon to the sub-prefecture, including the *Manoir des Comtes*, the monuments bear witness to the city's major development phases.**

## 1. THE SQUARE JULES HALGAND

Situated at the confluence of the Vienne and the Goire, it still has traces of the fortifications of the Saint-Maxime quarter (base of two towers and the wall). This site has been occupied for several purposes all related to death : cemetery of the Saint-Maxime quarter with the chapel of Châteaueux in the Middle Ages, an abattoir in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the setting for the War Memorial from 1928. Also called *jardin vert* or green garden, this square bears the name of the longest-serving mayor of Confolens (from 1919 to 1949 with an interruption during the Second World War).

## 2. THE GOIRE MILL

While the present mill only dates from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there is evidence of the presence of a mill on the Goire from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Originally it was a tan mill which was converted into an oil mill (rapeseed and walnut) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Water for the millwheel is provided by a mill race to the Goire. The mill was in operation until the 1960s, when it produced oil twice a week. Even today, the tools used by the last miller Mr Queriaud can still be seen. Since 2018, it belongs to the municipality and was restored in 2023. It is the only mill in the region which still has its wheel, which makes it exceptional.

## 3. THE MANOIR DES COMTES

Built between 1490 et 1520, this manor is composed of several buildings and has architraves carved in the Renaissance style. Its location allowed it to control both the Pont du Goire and the Rue du Soleil, formerly the medieval Grand'Rue. Wrongly called the « Manor of the counts », the building was never used as a dwelling by the Count of Confolens. The first known owners were the Guimard, the county receivers. A town gate, the *Porte du Goire*, was built onto the square tower of the manor, as shown by traces of toothing in the wall.

## 4. THE HOUSE OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY

Third and last religious foundation of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the house of the Sisters of Charity appeared around 1670 and housed the hospital. It is situated in the heart of the Saint-Maxime quarter near the *Manoir des Comtes*. After the hospital was transferred in 1792, the building housed the administration of the district of Confolens until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After being occupied by a nursery school, the building was bought by the town in 1955. The tax office has been installed there since 1960, causing some modifications of the building (addition of a wing in the courtyard).



## 5. THE HOUSE OF THE DUKE OF EPERNON

This 15<sup>th</sup> century half-timbered house is one of the most emblematic of the town. Situated in the main medieval artery, it is not known if this house was a business or an inn. It owes its name to the legend of the Duke of Epernon. It tells that in 1619 the Duke gathered 300 gentlemen to prepare the escape of the Queen Marie of Médicis, imprisoned by her son Louis XIII in the Château de Blois. Divided in two in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it now belongs in its entirety to the town.

## 6. THE CHURCH OF SAINT-MAXIME

Mentioned as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the church of Saint-Maxime was the seat of a priory attached to the abbey in Lesterps. The oldest part dates from the 13<sup>th</sup> century : the portal in the Limousin style. It consists of several rows of pointed arches resting on a impost decorated with crockets and supported by posts. While the sacristy, or the chapel of the Sire, dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the church was altered in the 15<sup>th</sup> and, especially, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Father Blaudy supervised the work on the bell tower and the north door by reusing stones from the church of Saint-Michel (destroyed). The vaults, floor and stained glass windows also date from this period. A Michel-Merklin-Kuhn organ from 1923 was installed on the gallery in 2023.

## 7. THE DONJON

Standing at the top of the rocky promontory separating the Vienne from the Goire, the donjon dominates the town. With a square plan, it was built of courses of large stones of granite in the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century. A symbol of seignorial power, it was besieged by several counts of the Marche, including Boson III who died at its foot in 1091. The donjon, in ruins from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, only stands about ten metres high. Nevertheless it was taken by Protestant troops in 1568. A town gate, destroyed around 1790, stood nearby : the Saint-Michel gate. This is shown by the round tower set into a house.

## 8. THE SALLE

Built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the *Salle de justice* or Justice Room was located in the castle surrounding wall (or castrum). Its facade which faces the town is unusual with its twin bays on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor designed to provide light for the room set aside for the lord. The room on the ground floor, the *aula*, was reserved for judicial purposes. Two cells were set up nearby. A pointed arch door was built onto the Salle. It provided access between the castrum and the town. It has an *assommoir* or murder hole, an opening set above the passageway to defend the entrance by dropping stones upon the attackers.



**1. The chapel of the house of the Sisters of Charity, dedicated to Our Lady of Pity, has disappeared but a part of its altar (statue) is kept in the chapel former convent of the order of St Clare.**

© CLCC.

**2. From this angle, we can clearly see the crosses of St André which punctuate the facade of the house of the Duke of Epéron.**

© CLCC.

**3. Major monument of the quarter, the church of Saint-Maxime was put to an unusual use during the Revolution wars : a prison for Spanish soldiers.**

© CLCC.

**4. Preserved to a height of about ten metres, the donjon has this elegant Romanesque bay overlooking the Rue des Buttes.**

© Regional Cultural Inventory Service – Christian Rome / CLCC.

**5. Situated in the old castle surrounding wall (castrum), The Salle is characterised by its lack of decorations.**

© CLCC.





**1. The courthouse, although set back from the road, is impressive thanks to its neoclassical facade.**

© CLCC.

**2. On this old postcard, we can see the former college at the end of the classes.**

© Private collection.

**3. Built of granite ashlar and cut stones, the design of the Pont Neuf was very wide for the time, so much so that today two trucks can pass each other without difficulty.**

© CLCC.

**4. Located at the exit of the Pont Neuf, on left bank, the sub-prefecture became State House in 2016. It thus brings together different state services.**

© CLCC.





## 9. THE COURTHOUSE

The first project for the installation of a courthouse dates back to 1865. A possibility at the time was to modify the Dassier des Broses house but the purchase of the building by the town led the department to opt for a new construction. Standing on the road to Limoges, the building was constructed in accordance with the plans of the county architect Dubacq and inaugurated in 1868. It stands out for its neoclassical facade, a style much used for this type of building because its references to antiquity are associated with notions of order and rectitude. After its closure in 2010, the building was bought by the municipality. It will be rehabilitated to house an education-training center.

## 10. THE RECOLLECTS CONVENT

Built around 1616, the Recollects convent was the first convent heralding the Counter-Reformation in Confolens. It was established on virgin land outside the Saint-Maxime ramparts. The consuls financed its construction as well as that of the chapel (1622). The convent was closed during the Revolution and was transformed into a prison for women in 1793, a secondary school and then a college from 1808. The former convent now houses the offices of associations including the Confolens Festival. The chapel has been used as the cinema since 1919.

## 11. THE PONT NEUF

For reasons of traffic and public health, consideration was given to building a new bridge over the Vienne from 1845. This infrastructure completed the development of the Blossac esplanades. The works, carried out between 1848 and 1849, led to the arrival of numerous workers from the national workshops. The Pont Neuf is also called the Babaud-Laribière bridge, in tribute to its patron member of parliament and then prefect of Charente. Its construction radically changed the flow of traffic in the town where it remains the only crossing point in both direction over the Vienne.

## 12. THE SUB-PREFECTURE

When it was created in 1800, the sub-prefecture had no building. It was housed in turn in the Rue Théophile Gibouin, the presbytery of Saint-Maxime, the Dassier des Broses house and the Place of Fontorse. It was not until the end of the 1840s that the department purchased land on the left bank and built the sub-prefecture. Constructed in accordance with the plans of Paul Abadie the elder in a neoclassical style, it was inaugurated in 1852. Its position on the Saint-Barthélemy side made it possible to restore the balance of power vis-à-vis the Saint-Maxime quarter, the historic place of the exercise of power.





### 13. THE RUE DES PORTES D'ANSAC

In the Middle Ages this district of the town was attached to the parish of Ansac-sur-Vienne, hence its name. One of the town gates in the Saint-Barthélemy quarter was at the intersection of the Voie Latine. This street was mostly composed of tanner or merchant houses and is characterised by its numerous half-timbered facades of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. A bustling street from the Middle Ages onwards, the Rue des Portes d'Ansac lost its dynamism with the construction of the Pont Neuf and the modification of the traffic axes.

### 14. THE PLACE OF FONTORSE

The place of Fontorse (gushing fountain) takes its name from the fountain standing in its centre. There is evidence of its presence from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards but it only took its present form in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Set on the commercial axe crossing the town, the square is a dynamic place just like the Rue du Soleil. With the construction of the Pont Neuf and the shifting of the commercial axe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the square lost its predominance. It is now a residential area. The presence of several town houses and former inns are an indication of the driving role it played in the history of the town.

### 15. THE CONVENT OF THE ORDER OF ST CLARE

Built around 1638, the convent of the order of St Clare was the second convent in the town. The chapel was built around 1675. From 1658 onwards, the sisters took care of the education of young girls until the Revolution. In 1792, the municipality transferred the hospital to the convent. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the hospital was enlarged and renovated thanks to a bequest from the Labajouderie family. The chapel, rarely open to the public, still has its 17<sup>th</sup> century furniture. The hospital moved in April 2015. Bought by a private investor, it is being transformed into a complex combining luxury housing and a res.

### 16. THE CHURCH OF SAINT-BARTHÉLEMY

The seat of a priory attached to the abbey in Lesterps, the church was built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The fact that it is dedicated to Saint-Barthélemy, the patron of tanners, shows the importance of tanneries in this same quarter. While the nave and the portal appear to be Romanesque, the side chapels on the north side date from the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the height of the bell tower was increased after 1630. Following the construction of the ramparts in the quarter after 1469, the church found itself outside the walls. The parish cemetery extended up to the parvis of the church until around 1840.



1. Attached to Ansac-sur-Vienne, the Rue des Portes d'Ansac brought together influential families of tanners such as the Babaud family.

© CLCC.

2. The place of Fontorse is lined by several town houses ; among them, the Babaud de la Fordie house, built by the tax receivers around 1770-1775.

© CLCC.

3. The choir of the hospital chapel has an altarpiece-tabernacle set in golden wood from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, protected as historical monuments.

© CLCC.

4. The church of Saint-Barthélemy is the only remaining building of the priory established on this site in from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It has retained its Romanesque character.

© CLCC.



1. The construction of the station in 1887 led to a specific growth of the district with the creation of the *Café de la Gare* just opposite.

© CLCC.

2. From Gambetta avenue, you can see the « Casino », in particular the slaughter building.

© CLCC.

3. To have on of the most complete views of the Pont Vieux, the best place to go is the *Porte du Gué*.

© CLCC.

4. The *Porte du Gué* still allows access to the banks of the Vienne, as it did for washerwomen until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

© CLCC.







### 17. THE STATION

Inaugurated in 1887, the station in Confolens stands on a railway junction formed by the Roumazières – Le Vigeant line and the Petit Mairat line linking Confolens to Angoulême via Champagne-Mouton. Like many French stations, the one in Confolens consists of a two-storey central part and two wings. The use of slate for the roof indicates the role of the railway in the transport of materials. Closed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is now occupied by the Railway Association of Charente Limousine.

### 18. THE OLD ABATTOIR : THE CASINO

This abattoir replaced the one situated in the square Jules Halgand. Located in the outskirts on the Saint-Barthélemy side for reasons of hygiene, it was built between 1923 and 1926 by the county architect Roger Baleix. Its particularity lies in its facade, consisting of a cornice with large dentils, which is why it is also called the Casino. Concrete was used to make the roof frame and the supporting pillars but also the bays and the cornice. It was transformed into an industrial dairy, then sold back to the commune in 1985 and now houses the municipal workshops.



### 19. THE PONT VIEUX

Probably built in the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, this bridge was the only crossing point over the Vienne in Confolens. It originally has a drawbridge and three fortified towers : the Saint-Maxime tower, the My (milieu) tower and the Saint-Barthélemy tower. These towers, in a very poor state of repair, were destroyed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to facilitate traffic. Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century it concentrated the flow of trade through the town. With the construction of the Pont Neuf in 1849, the Pont Vieux lost its importance but remains a symbolic place. The three fortified towers are now the emblem of the town of Confolens.

### 20. THE PORTE DU GUÉ

This former town gate, also called the *porte des Orgues*, shows where the old ford was situated beside the Pont Vieux. The orgues were a particular system of portcullis (or grating) which enabled one or several bars of the gate to be raised independently of the rest of the structure. It avoided destruction in the 18<sup>th</sup> century because it was no longer considered to be a town gate. Surmounted by a timber-framed structure, it seems very low today as a result of improvements made to the banks in 1986 to protect against the Vienne in spate.



### 21. THE PLACE HENRI COURSAGET

Formerly called Place du Minage, it was the setting for the grain market which took place at the covered market. At that time it was about half the size of the present square. The pillory also stood here. The square took its present form in the 19<sup>th</sup> century at the time of the construction of the new covered market and became the Place de l'Hôtel de ville. This larger square is at the heart of major cultural events. Since the summer of 2015, the square has been named after Henri Coursaget, a historic figure of the Confolens Festival.

### 22. THE DASSIER DES BROSSES HOUSE

This town house was built around 1775 by Jacques Joachim Dassier des Brosses, from a local family of standing. Built between courtyard and garden, the house was built by adapting to existing buildings of the period, which explains the dissymmetry of its facade and the front door not being in line with the gate. Sold as national property during the Revolution, it housed the court and the sub-prefecture. It has been the town hall since 1867, and underwent extensive work in 2012 in order to meet accessibility standards.



### 23. THE HALLES

This testimony to metallic architecture replaced the town's first covered market which disappeared around 1830 and stood on the edge of the square, along the present Rue du Maquis Foch (between the chemist's and the perfumery). The construction of this new building was at the heart of the development project of the square wished by the municipality. It was built in accordance with the plans by the architect Wiart, who took as his model the Halles Baltard in Paris, between 1892 and 1894. The weekly market and the monthly market on the 12<sup>th</sup> of each month are held there.





1. The place Henri Coursaget only took on its current form at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in connection with the destruction of a block and the construction of the Halles.

© CLCC.

2. This photo demonstrates the « original » appearance of the square, with a building block positioned just in front of the town hall.

© Private collection.

3. The Dasser des Brosses house, which housed the Town Hall until 1867, has a beautiful staircase with a wrought iron railing from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, listed as a Historic Monument.

© CLCC.

4. The covered market was built between 1892 and 1894 on the model of the Baltard covered market. The cast iron pillars bear the mark of the craftsman who made them : J. Guérin, a founder from Niort in 1892.

© CLCC.





## TOUR VISITE FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1> The square Jules Halgand            | 13> The rue des Portes d'Anzac           |
| 2> The Goire mill                      | 14> The Place of Fontorse                |
| 3> The manoir des comtes               | 15> The convent of the order of St Clare |
| 4> The house of the sisters of charity | 16> The church of Saint-Barthélemy       |
| 5> The house of the Duke of Epéron     | 17> The station                          |
| 6> The church of Saint-Maxime          | 18> The old abattoir : The Casino        |
| 7> The donjon                          | 19> The Pont Vieux                       |
| 8> The Salle                           | 20> The Porte du Gué                     |
| 9> The Courthouse                      | 21> The place Henri Coursaget            |
| 10> The recollects convent             | 22> The Dasser des Brosses house         |
| 11> The Pont Neuf                      | 23> The halles                           |
| 12> The sub-prefecture                 |  |

# CONFOLENS

## **WALK FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER :**

The tour proposed will allow you to discover the basics of the city's history in 23 stages (see the descriptions on pages 17 to 28). Through the buildings and neighborhoods, you will navigate between the Middle Ages, the 19<sup>th</sup> century or the Modern period.

## **TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT CONFOLENS (NON-EXHAUSTIVE LIST) :**

- Véronique DUJARDIN, Émilie MOINOT, Confolens - Charente, Parcours du patrimoine n°325, Geste Éditions, 2007.
- Books written by the local historian Pierre Boulanger.

This brochure was produced thanks to the results of the heritage inventory, carried out between 2003 and 2006 by the Confolentais Community of Communes and the general inventory service for the cultural heritage of the current Nouvelle Aquitaine Region.

To contact the service : 05.49.36.30.07

<https://www.patrimoine-nouvelle-aquitaine.fr>

Other brochures have been produced by the Land of art and history service. They are available at the Charente Limousine Tourist Office and for download from the website [www.charente-limousine.fr](http://www.charente-limousine.fr), page Pays d'art et d'histoire.

## **GUIDED TOURS**

Visits to the town of Confolens and the villages in the Charente Limousine area are possible all year round for groups, by contacting the Charente Limousine Tourist Office on 05.45.84.22.22 ; or directly the Land of art and history service on 05.45.84.14.08.

# « SET AMONG THE VERDANT HILLSIDES / CONFOLENS SMILES AT US WITH ITS BROAD FLOWING RIVER / STRADDLED BY TWO BRIDGES WHOSE ARCHES OF STONE / BOLSTER THE RAMPARTS WITH WELCOMING BALUSTRADES »

Jeanne BRUNET, *Images de mon pays*, 1965.

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**The Heritage service**, directed by the project manager of Land of art and history, organizes various activities to discover and promote the territory's heritage to its inhabitants and visitors in the company of professional guides.

## For all information

Land of art and history service  
Charente Limousine Community of communes  
8 rue Fontaine des jardins  
16 500 Confolens  
Tel : 05.45.84.14.08.  
celine.deveza@charente-limousine.fr  
Charente Limousine Tourist Office  
Tel : 05.45.84.22.22.  
tourisme@charente-limousine.fr  
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## Nearby

In the Nouvelle Aquitaine Region : the towns of Bayonne, Bergerac, Bordeaux, Cognac, Dax, La Réole, Limoges, Pau, Périgueux, Rochefort, Royan, Saintes, Sarlat, Thouars ; the lands of GrandAngoulême, of Grand Châtelleraut, Grand Poitiers, Grand Villeneuve, Hautes Terres Corrésiennes and Ventadour, Île of Ré, Mellois in Poitou, Monts of Barrages, Parthenay-Gâtine, Pyrénées béarnaises, Saint-Jean-de-Luz and Ciboure, Vézère of Ardoise, Vienne and Gartempe.



Direction régionale  
des Affaires culturelles  
de Nouvelle-Aquitaine



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