

A major centre during the Revolution

The Revolutionary Tribunal

In 1790, the mayor of Paris sealed the doors of the Palace, up until then the seat of the Parlement de Paris*. The Revolutionary Tribunal initiated in March 1793 took over the Grand Chamber. In July, Robespierre joined the Committee for Public Safety with a programme based on virtue and terror. The “Law of Suspects” ordered the arrest of anyone pre-sumed to be an enemy of the Revolution or who confessed to being so.

Over 1793 and 1794, more than 2,700 people appeared before Fouquier-Tinville, the tribunal’s public prosecutor, including Queen Marie-Antoinette and Robespierre. The trials of famous people gave way to collective trials. In 1794, witnesses and defenders were eliminated and tens of people were guillotined each day. After the fall of Robespierre, the Tribunal was dissolved in May 1795.

Everyday life in the prison

The Conciergerie had a reputation for being the toughest of all prisons. During the Reign of Terror*, its cells accommodated several hundred prisoners kept in terribly unhealthy and crowded conditions. Up until 1794, “suspects” were kept together with common law prisoners. On the eve of their court appearance, prisoners were notified that their trial was to begin and of the charges brought against them by the “evening journal” or bill of indictment. Once the verdict had been given, prisoners sentenced to death were allowed to enjoy a final feast.

* Explanations overleaf.

Glossary

Capital: sculpted or engraved stone placed at the top of a column to hold up an arch.

Girondin: individual belonging to the particularly radical party formed in 1791 with deputies from the Gironde region.

Lit de justice: a session of the Parlement chaired by the king, whose authority prevailed.

Oratory: place for prayer.

Pailleux or payeux: the poorest prisoners, reduced to sleeping on straw (in French, paille).

Parlement de Paris: highest judicial court in the kingdom.

Pistolier: prisoner who could afford to pay a few pistoles for a cell with a bed.

Reign of Terror: period between the fall of the monarchy and late 1794, when an executive council and the town of Paris exercised joint power and actively pursued enemies of the Republic in France and abroad.

Practical information

Visit takes on average: 1 hour 15 minutes
Special tours for disabled people.



The Centre des monuments nationaux publishes a collection of guidebooks about French monuments, translated into several languages. Éditions du patrimoine publications are on sale in the bookshop-giftshop.

Centre des monuments nationaux
Conciergerie
Palais de la Cité
2 boulevard du Palais
75001 Paris
tél. 01 53 40 60 97
la.conciergerie@monuments-nationaux.fr

www.monuments-nationaux.fr



Conciergerie

Palace and prison

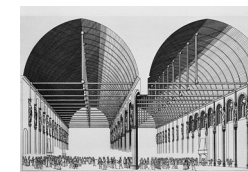
Residence of the Kings of France

In the 6th century, Clovis, the first French king, established his royal residence on the Ile-de-la-Cité. Five centuries later, Hugues Capet, the first Capetian king, established his council and government in the Palais de la Cité, which thus became the seat of royal power.

Symbol of royal power

In the 14th century, Philippe IV the Fair - continuing the work of his grandfather, Saint Louis - turned the Palace into a prestigious symbol of the monarchy. It became the seat of the Parlement de Paris.

Palace of Justice and prison



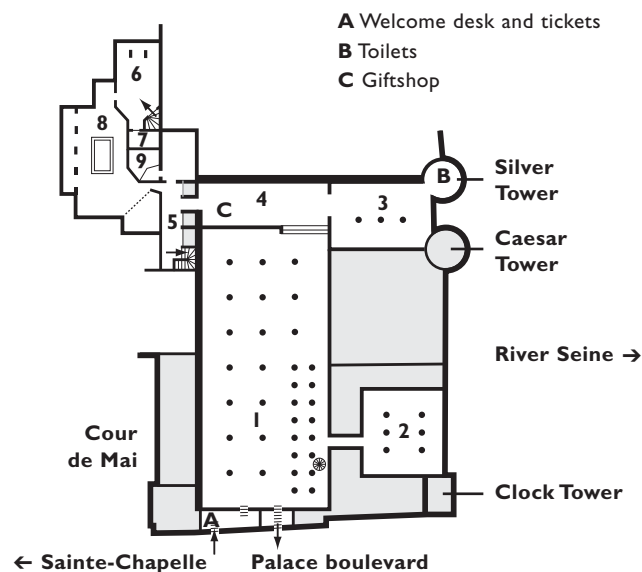
At the end of the 14th century, Charles V left the royal residence on the Ile-de-la-Cité for the hôtel Saint-Pol, since destroyed, following the assassination of his father’s advisors. He appointed a steward, or “concierge”, endowed with legal powers, to run the Palace and prison. Numerous prisoners of State were kept here, such as Ravailiac, Henri IV’s assassin. In later times, the Revolutionary Tribunal sat in the Palace and used it increasingly as a prison. The Conciergerie was listed as a historical monument in 1914.



The medieval halls

The lower parts, the only ones still standing today, were reserved for the Royal Guard and the numerous staff - clerks, officers and servants - who worked for the king and his family (about 2,000 people in all). The floor of the medieval halls is still at its 14th-century level. The creation of embankments in the 19th century raised the level of the rest of the Ile-de-la-Cité and its other buildings.

- 1 The Hall of Men-at-Arms**, built from 1302 onwards under Philippe le Bel, is one of the finest examples in Europe of Gothic secular architecture. Consisting of four rib vaulted “naves”, the hall was generously lit by twin windows, traces of which can be seen on the left wall. This huge refectory was heated by four large fireplaces. On the left hand wall, there is still a fragment of the black marble table used during the sumptuous receptions held by the Capetian monarchy in the Palace’s Great Ceremonial Hall, on the upper floor. The latter, which has now disappeared, used to be served by spiral staircases, an example of which can still be seen on the right hand side of the hall.
- 2 The kitchen outbuilding**, built during the reign of John the Good and of which only the lower level remains, was built slightly later and used by the king’s staff. Foodstuffs were delivered there directly by river.
- 3 The Guardroom** was built around the same time as the Hall of Men-at-Arms. The capitals* on the central pillar are thought to portray Heloise and Abelard. This hall was used as an antechamber to the Great Chamber on the upper floor (no longer standing), where the king held meetings with his council and his “*lits de justice**”. The Revolutionary Tribunal also sat here in 1793.



- 4 The Rue de Paris** which gets its name from that given to the executioner during the Revolution, “Monsieur de Paris”, was used to imprison *pailleux**. This area was once an integral part of the Hall of Men-at-Arms, but was separated off and raised in the 15th century.

The revolutionary halls

After the fire of 1776, Louis XVI modernized the Conciergerie prison, later used during the Revolution.

- 5 The Prisoners’ Gallery** was the prison’s main thoroughfare, where prisoners could wander freely.

Reconstructions can be seen of the Clerk’s Office, the room where prisoners’ names were registered; the concierge’s office, who under the Revolution was put in charge of the prisoners; and the Grooming Room, where condemned prisoners were stripped of their personal belongings before being executed. On the upper floor, in a room to the left of the stair-case, a list of the prisoners held in the Conciergerie during the Reign of Terror* is displayed. The various categories of prisoners - “*payeux**”, “*pistoliers**” and “high class guests” - are shown by a series of cells. In the following rooms, a display of objects and panels recount five and a half centuries of prison life at the Conciergerie.

- 6 The Girondins’ Chapel** stands on the site of the king’s medieval oratory*. The 21 Girondins* feasted here prior to their execution on 30 October 1793.
- 7 Marie-Antoinette’s Chapel** was built in 1815 on the exact spot where her prison cell stood.
- 8 The Women’s Courtyard** surrounded by two floors of prisoners’ cells, still has the fountain where they washed their clothes and one of the stone tables at which they ate, and the “Corner of the Twelve” or “of last goodbyes”. This is where condemned prisoners waited in groups of 12 for the cart that would carry them off to the scaffold.
- 9 Marie-Antoinette’s cell** was reconstituted on part of the actual site of her dungeon. She was permanently guarded by two gendarmes.

* Explanations overleaf.