

VIA FORA! DANGER AT SEA

THE HISTORY OF BEGUR'S TOWERS

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Our gratitude to—Arxiu Diocesà de Girona. Arxiu Municipal de Begur.



CONDITIONS OF ENTRY AND EXHIBITION PANELS



Access to some areas of this site may be more physically demanding than to other areas and is therefore not suitable for sufferers of vertigo and/or those of limited mobility.



Access to the tower is limited to a maximum number of 6 people at any one time.



Visits are not recommended for children under the age of 7.



It is recommended that children aged 7 or over be accompanied by an adult.



Rucksacks, handbags and large objects may not be taken into the tower.



Due to the low ceilings and small spaces, all visitors should take care not to injure themselves.



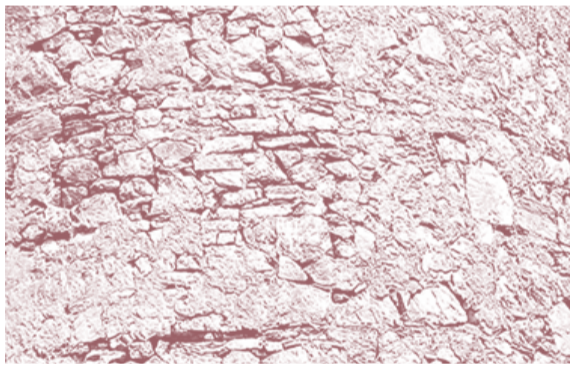
All visitors access the tower at their own risk.

THE TOWERS OF BEGUR

Both the watchtowers and the defense towers are, together with the Catalanian farmhouses, the most important and most characteristic rural buildings of the post-feudal era of coastal settlements. A good example is to be found in the Mas d'en Pinc tower built between the end of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century. ✱

To build these towers, permission had to be sought from the mayor — the territorial representative of the sovereign or nobleman of those lands — from the Council or from the Courts, and construction could not be commenced until official approval had been granted by one of these institutions.

The towers were grouped according to their location: **SINGLE** watchtowers were generally to be found in towns and were either directly **ATTACHED** { right next to } to or near a farmhouse, like the tower of Mas d'en Pinc, and finally those which were **GROUPED** together and shared by several farmhouses.



Despite having little knowledge or skills about construction, the master builders managed to build towers which have remained standing to this very day. ◆

CONSTRUCTION

The Mas d'en Pinc tower and all the other towers erected on our coastline were built with stone extracted from the nearest quarries; the stones were set in lime mortar but they were rarely cut into square blocks or carved in any way. The design was very solid and based on a system of walls and vaults that were repeated on each floor. ✧

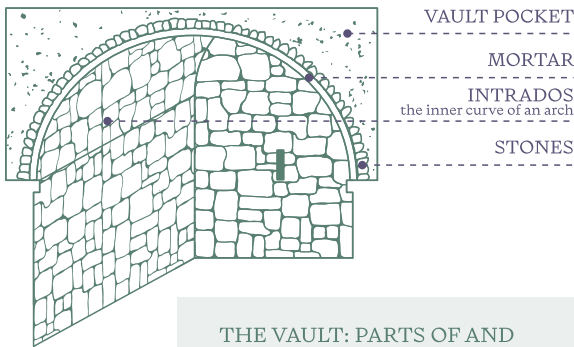
THE WALLS

The walls were strong and robust, especially in the case of the circular towers since they were required to bear the weight of the vaults. The Mas d'en Pinc tower provides a good example of this type of well-preserved. Normally, the thickness of these ranged between 1.2 and 1.6 metres, in the case of the ground floor, and between 0.65 and 0.90 metres at the highest point of the vault. When the construction exceeded the height of a man, scaffolding was then used.

THE VAULTS

The vaults were generally built with stone and mortar and were constructed by means of a wooden framework or via bent canes, which were supported on trusses.

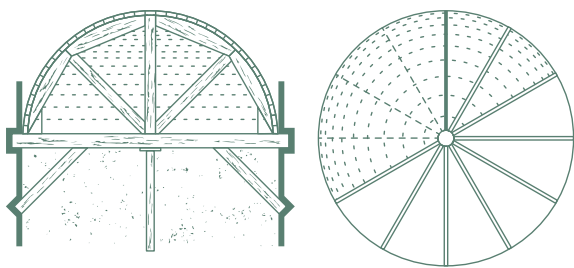
The trusses were wooden structures used to support the framework of the vault. A set of interwoven canes were then placed above the trusses and a layer of lime mortar would be used to cover the intrados {the lower or inner curve of an arch}.



THE VAULT: PARTS OF AND MATERIALS USED

Drawing based on the original by Jaume Noguer. — Pirates, corsaris i torres de moros. Quaderns de Palafrugell. 1998.

Next, and following the outline of the vault, layers of compacted stone were added to compress and secure the structure, in addition to sand and mortar to fill the vault pockets. This latter part was filled with rubble, stones or even ash, to reinforce the vault. Once the materials had sufficiently hardened, the truss was removed. ♦



TRUSS USED TO MAKE THE VAULTS OF CIRCULAR TOWERS

Drawing based on the original by Jaume Noguer. — Pirates, corsaris i torres de moros. Quaderns de Palafrugell. 1998.

ARCHITECTURE

The towers generally had two or three floors, the height between each floor ranging between 12 and 14 metres. The Mas d'en Pinc tower reaches a height of almost 13 metres, all of which is evenly distributed over three perfectly preserved floors. ✧

The lower floors were used to store weapons, gunpowder and food. On the other hand, the upper floor was the area where the guards remained while the attack lasted and hence the existence of windows with loopholes and stone benches on either side.

Originally, the towers were not attached to the farmhouses, although today the Mas d'en Pinc tower is connected to the house by means of stone steps and a gate which provides access to both. So, the Mas d'en Pinc tower offers us a clear representative example of what the structures of these towers were like.

1 — THE MACHICOLATION

An opening located above the door which was used to defend access to the tower by throwing stones and burning straw upon the enemy.

2 — CORBELS

Construction elements that support the machicolation.

3 — THE ROOFTOP

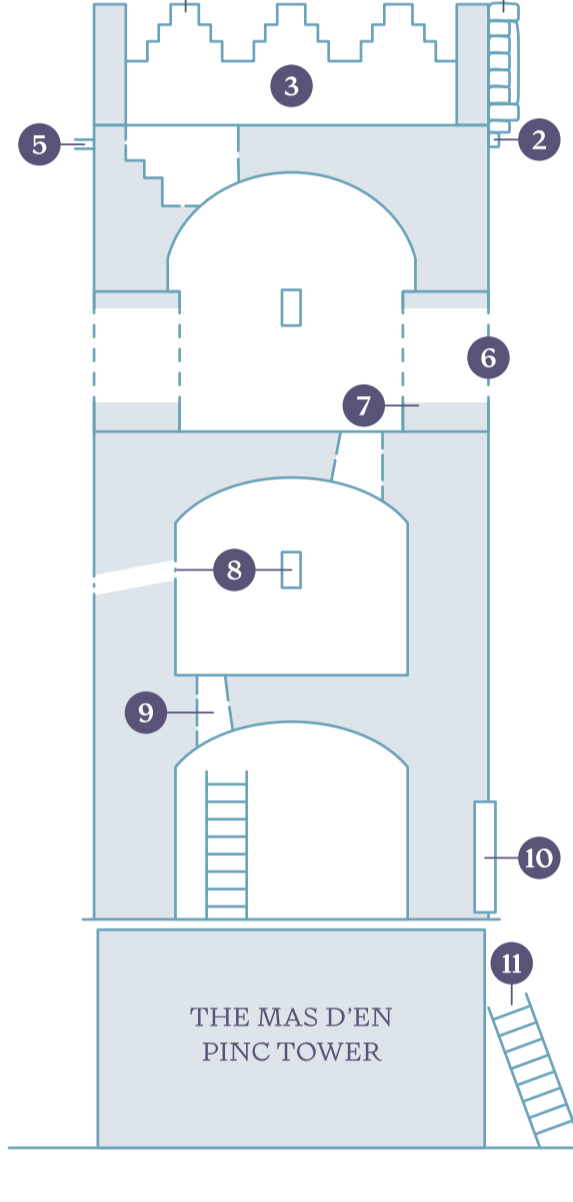
This was from where the rest of the population was alerted to the danger by lighting bonfires or sounding sea horns.

4 — THE BATTLEMENTS

A stone mound that served as a form of defense and which can be found in either a rectangular or tiered shape.

5 — GARGOYLE

Opening in the roof through which to drain the water that could accumulate from the rain.



6 — WINDOW

This was placed at a certain height from the ground and offered panoramic views of the surrounding area. In Mas d'en Pinc the windows incorporate loopholes or embrasures to allow the occupants to defend themselves against attackers.

7 — WINDOW SEAT

A typical feature of the farmhouses, they were located on each side of the window to allow people to sit.

8 — EMBRASURE

A small opening that allowed a person to shoot the enemy from a vantage point. They usually had a granite surround, something which can also be observed in Catalanian farmhouses and churches.

9 — TRAP DOOR

A small opening that connected the different levels of the tower. The small openings forced any attackers to go through one by one, giving the repelling forces the upper hand.

10 — POSTERN

The access door to the tower which was located at a height of about 3 metres and thus making access difficult. They were small in size and normally square in shape and had a stone surround.

11 — LADDER

Access to the postern had to be gained via a wooden ladder or footbridge, which was withdrawn when the attackers arrived. Over the course of time and once the danger of piracy had disappeared, the footbridge was replaced by a permanent stone bridge.

Taking into account the weapons of the time, the short duration of the raids and the reduced number of attackers, the tower offered a virtually impregnable shelter despite the fact that both the farmhouses and the fields ended up being burned at the hands of the pirates. ♦

DEFENSE AND SHELTER

The end of feudalism turned the farmhouses into the new target of the invading forces. In Begur, between the end of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth towers were erected next to farmhouses, cliffs or hills. ✱

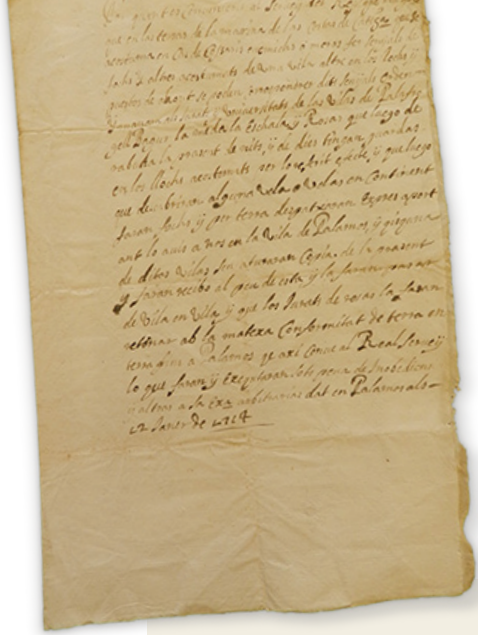
The Begur watch tower system relied upon one very important important ring of look-out post: that of PUIG DE SA GUÀRDIA and PUIG DE SON RICH.



Warning signals which reached Puig de Son Rich and Son Molas were sent from Sa Guàrdia and those which reached the Castle were sent from Mas d'en Geli.

From those look-out posts residents organized themselves into groups of lookouts. The people who kept watch were called “talaiers”, lookouts or escort details, and they were in charge of alerting people to danger by crying out “Moors on the coast” and “via fora!” {a type of warning cry urging residents to hide}, in addition to blowing warning horns during the day and maintaining bonfires alight during the night.

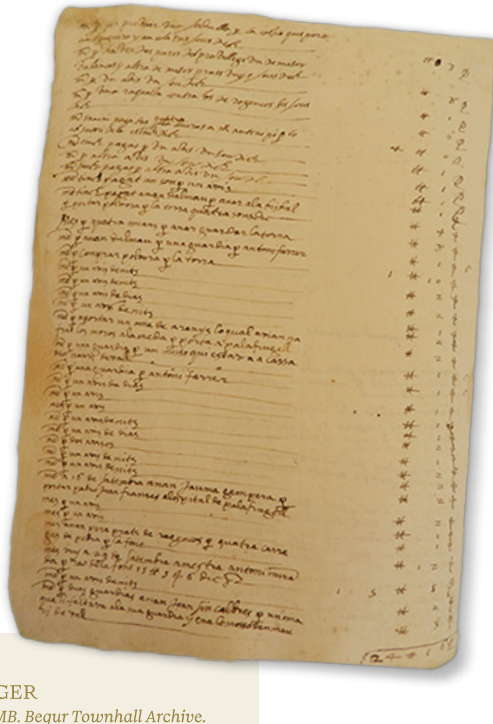
Then the priest would ring the bells and the villagers would take refuge in the towers, in the church or hide among the rocks one or other of the coves.



LETTER EXPLAINING HOW TO WARN OTHERS
— AMB. Begur Townhall Archive. 1714.

Letter explaining to the Town Councils of Vilas de Palafrugell, Begur, the Meda {the current Illas Medas, where a fortified observation post once existed}, la Escala and Rosas how residents should be warned in the event of danger. All these settlements are asked to provide lookouts for their respective towers in order to carry out guard duty.

Although this “network” was maintained by local authorities, lookouts were not always available. Warnings or messages alerting residents to the presence of corsairs or pirates in other towns allowed the people of Begur to organize the guard details only when it was strictly necessary. ♦



LEDGER
— AMB. Begur Townhall Archive.
1584–1638.

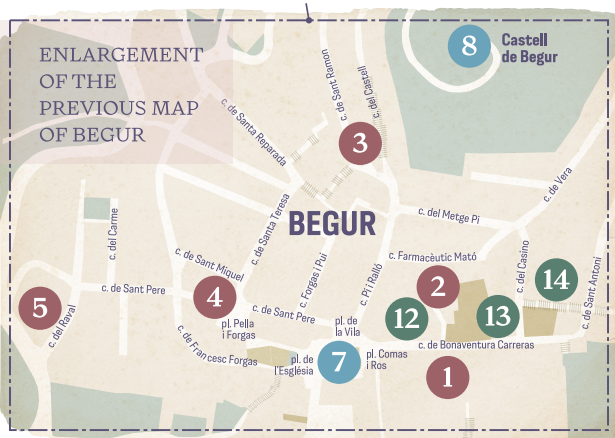
I have paid to go from Dalmau to La Bisbal to take gunpowder for the tower..... 4 wages
—Item: Four men to guard the tower..... 8 wages
—Item: Night-time warning signal 2 wages

BEGUR'S DEFENSIVE STRUCTURE

Begur's defense towers are listed as an asset of National Cultural Interest within the Inventory of the Architectural Heritage of Catalonia. ✨

There is physical and documentary evidence of the existence of several defense towers in Begur, of which six are preserved in good condition whilst the rest have been adapted or have disappeared.

In addition, there is documentation {texts written by lookouts, past cartography etc.} that would show the existence of six more single or individual towers, probably managed by the local authorities, despite the fact that it has not been possible to find any evidence of their remains. ♦



TOWERS PRESERVED

- 1 Tower of Hermanac de Can Pi
- 2 Tower of Can Marqués
- 3 Sant Ramon's Tower {Tower d'en Caixa}
- 4 Tower and house of Pella i Forgas
- 5 Tower of Mas Mauri de Vall
- 6 Tower of Mas d'en Pinc

TOWERS OVERTHROWN

- 11 Tower of Mas Son Geli
- 12 Tower of Can Pi
- 13 Tower of Mas Carreras
- 14 Tower of Can Ferriol

OTHER DEFENSIVE ELEMENTS

- 7 Sant Peres's Church
- 8 Tower of Homage—Castle
- 9 Tower of the Romanic Castle—Esclanyà
- 10 Tower of Sa Tuna

HYPOTHETICAL TOWERS

- 15 Illa Roja
- 16 Puig Rodó
- 17 Santa Reparada's Convent
- 18 Son Molas
- 19 Son Rich
- 20 Puig de Sa Guàrdia

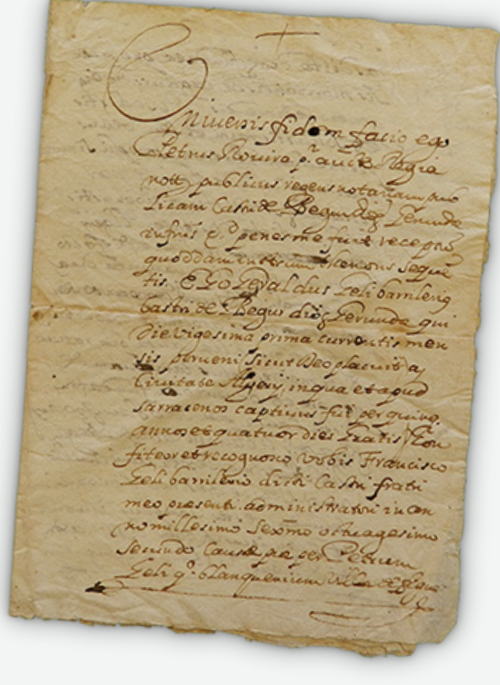
THE SLAVES

THE VICTIMS AND THEIR FREEDOM

Given the dangerous nature of the sea, the village of Begur possessed several institutions authorized to raise money to rescue captive residents, also called slaves. ✱

THE CAUSA PIA OF PERE GELI

Was created by PERE GELI BLANQUER in 1551 shortly before his death. It was the first philanthropic institution in Begur. After Blanquer's death, his heirs were forced to sell all their assets to create a ransom fund any enslaved members of the family, just as Pere Geli had instructed them to do. Moreover, with the remaining money, loans were offered to other residents of the village in order to pay their ransoms.



RESCUE OF THE SLAVE GERARD
GELI THANKS TO THE CAUSA PIA
—AMB. Begur Townhall Archive. 1692.

LA GERMANDAT DELS CATIUS {BROTHERHOOD OF THE CAPTIVES}

Was overseen by the town councillors and it coordinated its work with the Bací.

EL BACÍ DELS CATIUS {THE “BACÍ (COLLECTION PLATE)” OF THE CAPTIVES}

Was managed by the parish of Begur and had three ways to raise money.

- The first came from donations that occurred during the church services.
- The second was through the fishermen, who provided one tenth of the income which they earned on Sundays and Bank Holidays and for which permission was specifically sought from Rome.
- Finally, the third source of income was that which came from the fishermen's “shacks or huts” called “catus” where they dyed their nets.

We have evidence of a legal document {Capbreu} of 1728, which shows that the parish of Begur had just such a “shack” in Sa Riera and another one in Sa Tuna, both of which possibly served as “Catus”.

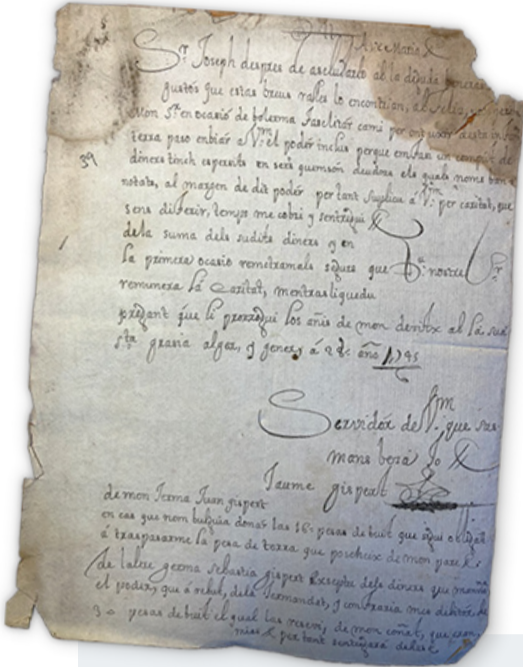
LA CONFRARIA DEL ROSARI {THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE ROSARY}

Created in 1610, was another institution also devoted to the freeing of captives and from which many people from Begur benefitted. ♦

JAUME GISPERT

SLAVE IN ALGIERS

Jaume Gispert was born in Begur on December 12, 1715. At the age of 22 and already engaged to Reparada Rayó, he was captured by the Muslims and sent to Algiers.



LETTER FROM JAUME GISPERT, WHICH IS ENCLOSED WITH THAT OF BROTHER PERE AROSTEGUI

— Diocesan Archive of Girona - All the rights reserved. 1745.

In which he demands that if his brother is unwilling to help him, he should have to return to him the piece of land which their father left to them both.

Apart from the typical jobs as a slave, he managed to work in the Royal Hospital of Algiers, where he met the administrator Brother Pere Arostegui, a priest from the Order of the Holy Trinity of the “Redentores Calzados” who helped him, along with other slaves, to write his letters.



LETTER FROM JAUME GISPERT

— Diocesan Archive of Girona - All the rights reserved. 1745.

In which he surrenders all his authority in order to secure the money for his freedom. In this letter he also states the implications that his actions will have upon his siblings.

They were letters of despair addressed to his siblings who he treated as traitors for not having sent the money they had collected from the brotherhood for his ransom; letters to Begur’s Father, Josep Mont, who had been granted powers to be able to execute the payment etc.

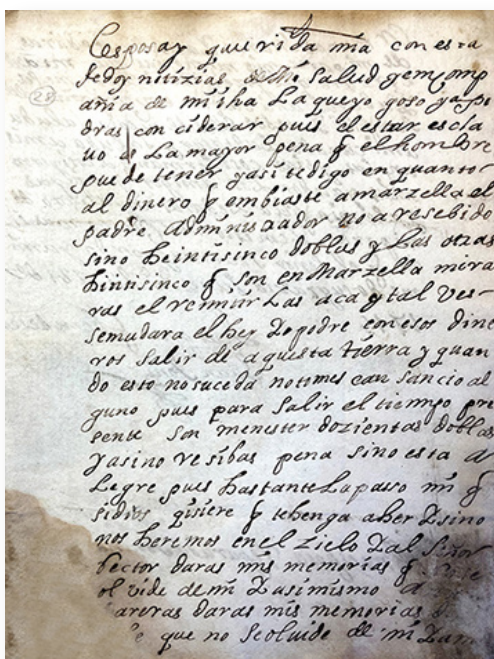
A story of hatred between siblings, solidarity between slaves and the hope of a love at risk finally ends after seven years with the liberation of the protagonist.

After his return in July 1745, Jaume Gispert married Reparada Rayó who had been waiting for him all this time. Finally, Gispert died on Christian soil in 1780 at age of 65. ♦

JOAN TUNÍ

SLAVE IN TUNIS

From Begur, was captured by pirates while he was fishing at sea and sent to Tunisia as a slave.



LETTER FROM JOAN TUNÍ TO HIS WIFE
— Diocesan Archive of Girona – All the rights reserved. 1745.

Saying that he has only received half of the ransom. The letter ends with Joan Tuní saying "If God wants us to be together, we will be, but If not we will meet again in heaven."

His wife Reparada Forgas, needed almost four years to get the 252 coins for the ransom. On November 16, 1740, she hired the merchant and smuggler Josep Geli to deliver the money to Monsieur l'Estrada, a Marseillais intermediary who had contacts with the Bei {governor} of Tunisia concerning the freeing of the slaves.

Between items of tobacco, currency exchanges, false receipts and the appearance of a new intermediary {Macià Cateura}, Tuní received only half of the ransom money. Given these circumstances, a trial was held which ended on March 30, 1748.

The Royal Commissioner of War, of the Navy and Principal Minister of the Principality of Catalonia convicted Macià Cateura, who had already died, and forced his heirs to deliver the missing money in order to acquire Tuní's freedom.

Unfortunately, the money did not arrive in time and Joan Tuní died at the age of 39 in Tunisia after 14 years of slavery. ♦