

« Knowing how to utilize today's heritage for tomorrow » is the reflection that came to mind after having read the Arcachon Aquarium-Museum's petition and studied the reasons behind it's appeal for support.



The archaeology room of the Aquarium-Museum.

Petitions and campaigns to save heritage assets are numerous, especially where archaeological resources are concerned. Even though ArkéoTopia believes it is important to be aware of issues relating to the protection of the past, we equally consider that we are not living in a museum. It is therefore natural as has been the case in the past and will continue to be in the future that certain witnesses to our history disappear with time. However, there needs to be limits to what can be accepted.

Indeed, in a sadly high number of examples, the demolition of a heritage asset has proved to be both unnecessary and more costly than it's improvement or renovation. In light of the petition [1] and the town of Arcachon's background in urban development, we believe this is also the case where the Arcachon Aquarium-Museum is concerned. **The current plans to demolish the museum can be justified neither by the "Coastal Laws" [2] nor by the plans for the site's future development when compared with what can be done with it.**

Built in 1866, the Arcachon Aquarium-Museum was from the very beginning home to the *Arcachon Scientific Society*, which has been recognised as a public interest foundation since 1924. It is one of the world's foremost Aquarium-Museum's and this alone justifies its preservation [3]. However, it is not solely for this reason that a number of Arcachon Basin associations believe it is necessary to preserve the building. Consensus has been reached for a number of other reasons and these are set out in the footnotes and bibliography [4]. One of the most active associations has been the [Collectif Populaire de Défense des Aquaria Convoyés](#) (CPDAC-People's Collective for the Defense of Coveted Aquaria-CPDAC). It is [campaigning for the signature of postal or online petitions](#); we submitted the latter on 29th December 2010 with a comment on our position which may be summarized as follows:

although the building is certainly in need of renovation it is unfortunate that the town authorities, who had previously inaugurated a high quality Community Centre and had encouraged redevelopment of the town centre that was still ongoing at the time of the petition, had not taken the opportunity to restore the structure. The building could have then been used as a venue for

the different associations working on the history and archaeology of the town and its Basin. At the very least, the authorities could allow the Aquarium-Museum to continue by opening an archaeological custodianship project managed by local associations and with the aim of promoting among both young and old awareness of not only recent 20th century history but also of the much earlier vestiges present in Arcachon, Testes and other towns along the Basin which are much richer than many imagine.

**We urge you [to sign this petition](#)**; the more we are the more we will succeed in bringing pressure to bear. In addition to receiving by post a handsome certificate confirming your support of the international petition to save the Arcachon Aquarium-Museum you will have also contributed to the preservation of the site.



We must stress that we are not calling for the preservation of the complex as a whole, which includes the neighbouring marine biology building, but only of the Aquarium-Museum itself. Equally, we do not contest the idea of creating an oceanographic department even though the site chosen at present may not be the best one for this purpose as pointed out by the Association pour la Sauvegarde du Site d'Arcachon (A.S.S.A-Association for the Preservation

of the Site of Arcachon) [5]. Instead, we would like to draw attention to the numerous possibilities the site offers whether as testament to an era and its interest in science and an archive for the preservation of archaeological records or as a tourist site with potential for Basin schools and the University Michel de Montaigne (Bordeaux III). In effect, both the general public and its younger members could be introduced by local associations and education and research organisations to archaeology and other studies of human history. The Aquarium-Museum itself provides ideal premises for both archaeology and history students. There, they can participate in work experience placements (building archaeology), material analysis and even use the site itself for Master and Phd research as it should be reminded that archaeology does not only concern excavations.

Knowing how to utilize today's heritage for tomorrow means working together hand in hand so as to best capitalize on what is already available and meet the challenges facing society. **We believe that if politicians, financiers and associations come to an agreement, this will be to the future benefit of politicians, researchers, associations, students, the public and tourists. It is possible to rise to the economic challenge (tourism, education, facilitating employment...); we should not let this opportunity pass us by.**

On behalf of ArkéoTopia

Jean Olivier Gransard-Desmond (President)

[1] Link to [the CPDAC's site for the latest legal updates](#) as well as the [News Page of the Association pour la Sauvegarde du Site d'Arcachon \(A.S.S.A.\)](#) website.

[2] Link to the Wikipedia page on [Coastal Laws](#) for a simplified summary as well as for a link to the original text on the site of légifrance.

[3] Link to [the Arcachon Aquarium-Museum background page](#) so as to better understand the importance of this building for the town.

[4] Link to [the A.S.S.A's position](#) and the [Société Historique et Archéologique d'Arcachon et du Pays de Buch \(SHAAPB- The Arcachon and Pays de Buch Historical and Archaeological Society\) support motion](#) on the CPDAC website.

[5] Link to [the association's news bulletin dated 18th January 2011](#).

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► To see pictures of the Arcachon Aquarium-Museum as it is today as well as its archaeological collections, [see "Visite du Musée-Aquarium d'Arcachon" page](#) on *Du Côté du Teich* website that presents beautiful images of the Basin and local architecture. The webmasters of this site have themselves called for the preservation of the museum as can be seen from the post entitled ["Save the Arcachon Aquarium-Museum"](#). We take the opportunity to thank them for agreeing to the publication of pictures of the Museum's collections.

► To see postcards of the Aquarium-Museum in days gone by link to [Arcachon nostalgia's Aquarium page](#).

► For those curious or passionate about history and archaeology, the [Société Historique et Archéologique d'Arcachon et du Pays de Buch \(SHAAPB\)](#) maintains a book collection and regularly organises conferences and events on the Pays de Buch heritage.