



Montluçon

A town of contrast and discovery



MEDIEVAL TOWN

Foreword

Experts have several opinions on the origin of the word Montluçon.

As far back as the eighth century through to the thirteenth century, references to « *Mons Lucii* » can be found in ancient charters.

In the past, the hill had a Gallo-Roman oppidum to defend the Cher valley. References to a « *castrum* » can be found in the eleventh century.

By the marriage alliance of Beatrix de Montlucon to Archambault VII, Lord of Bourbon, Montluçon entered into the domain of the Lords of Bourbon.

You can admire the town's coat of arms in the hall of the hôtel de ville on a sixteenth century stone carving: « *azure sky with a silver castle set atop a mountain of gold with a golden sun shining above* ».

The town experienced prosperous times under Louis II of Bourbon, then again in the fifteenth century.

Its return to the crown of France in the sixteenth century corresponded to a period of calm in the run-up to the great industrial revolution of the nineteenth century which radically transformed the town.

You will be won over by the charm of the town's architecture of the Middles Ages, its religious and civil monuments, its gardens and flowerbeds awarding the town the « *trois fleurs* » (town in bloom) label.







1

Rue Grande

Statue of Saint Anne and the Virgin
(at the corner of the Saint-Anne restaurant)

Saint Anne was highly popular in the Bourbon area and her popularity became widespread in the late fifteenth century. Many representations of the saint adorn the churches of Montluçon. A procession is held every year on 26th July in her honour.

Turn left - go down rue Grande

Houses of the medieval town

N° 2 rue des Serruriers

Most of the timber-frame houses date back to the 15th and 16th centuries. The wood-framed floors rest on a stone load-bearing wall and are infilled with daub. The ground floor was often home to arts and crafts stalls.



N° 39 and 56 rue Grande

Two timber-frame houses, one opposite the other. The Saltire-shaped struts interpreting St Andrew's cross owe their name to the martyrdom of the Apostle.

Rue Porte-Bretonnie

The fortifications included four entrances, the best preserved of which still has one of its towers housing a coffee roasting house. It is named after the English (the Britons) who settled in this quarter for 17 years until they were ousted by Philippe Auguste in 1188.

2



Château des Ducs de Bourbon

Excavations of the esplanade revealed remnants of a thirteenth century castle but the current castle is partly due to the reconstruction carried out by Duke Louis II of Bourbon who died in Montluçon on 19th August 1410. His successors continued the work through to the fifteenth century.

10 towers defended the castle that overlooked the town and was enclosed within a wall, itself boasting 40 towers and four entrances.

The rectangular living quarters adorned with mullion and transom windows is flanked to the south-west by an impressive square keep crowned by a crenellated parapet.



Saint-Pierre quarter

House of the Twelve Apostles

(to the right of Saint Peter's church)

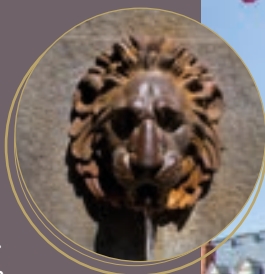
This is one of the most beautiful houses of the Saint-Pierre quarter. There used to be twelve statues of the apostles carved out of the timber frame of the first floor. There were unfortunately removed during the Revolution but you can still make out where they were.



The fountain of lions

(to the left of Saint Peter's church)

Formerly an ancient grotto and you can still see the sandstone arch vouching for when it was first built in the 12th century. It was altered in the 19th century when Volvic lava rock was used. Two cast iron lion heads adorn the new wall.



It was said that the water from this fountain had healing properties. Perhaps that is where the saying: *« Wet the lion's nose and you'll be happy all year long »* comes from?

Did you notice ?

A snake is carved into the front of a house, see if you can find it. Answer: to the left of the first window in the rue des 5 Piliers.

The house opposite the house of the 12 Apostles has a double projected construction, in other words an overhang to gain space on each floor. This also brought down the tax to be paid based on the footprint of the buildings.







12th century Saint Peter's church

Listed a historical monument in 1978. It has Auvergne and Berrichonne influences, particularly the short crossing with side passages called « *Berrichon passages* ».

You can admire three sculptures listed as Historical Monuments in the transept, on the left of the choir: they belong to « *the Golden Age of the Bourbons* » (between 1475 and 1525).



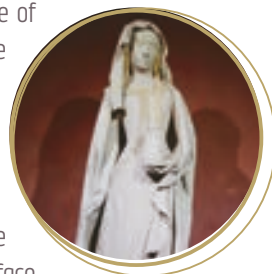
Second door of the church
(Rue des cinq piliers)

Made during the flamboyant Gothic art period of the 15th century with its ogee topped with ornate pinnacles.



Sainte-Barbe - Listed 15th century stone monument. Her attributes; a tower and palm leaf of martyrdom sum up her story. Locked up in a tower by her father until her wedding day, and christened in secret, she refused the suitor her father had chosen for her who went on to torture her and finally cut her head off. He was immediately struck down by a heaven-sent bolt of lightning. Saint-Barbe went on to become the patron saint of artillerymen and miners until 1969.

Mary Magdalene - Listed late 15th century stone statue. A perfect example of Bourbonnais art from the late 15th century with the upper part of her body slightly arched, her slim waist girdled in a corselet, ribbons and fine silk dress. Her slender face and slightly slanting eyes made her the ideal woman during the reign of Anne of France and Peter II. Said to have been sculpted by Jean de Chartres, she is carrying a jar of perfume she used to anoint Jesus' feet while at the home of Simon.



Pietà - Early 16th century

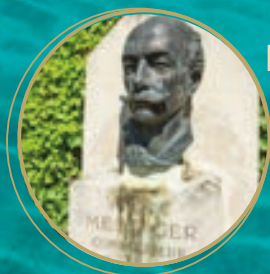
Close to Jean de Chartres, the « *Maître de Bourbon* » left a few traces in the Bourbon area. The style of the artist is characterised by the rounded faces with broad foreheads, fine features and pinched lips.

Continue down the rue des 5 Piliers then rue Pierre Petit

5

Around the Wilson Garden

Jardin Wilson This French style garden, also known as the City Wall garden, was created in 1937 in the gardens of the surrounding town houses. It was officially inaugurated in 1939 by Marx Dormoy. Little remains of the original wall, only a part of the curtain wall. The fortifications were almost entirely destroyed during the 18th century. Take your time to wander around the gardens: visit the rose garden and shaded terraces, the alleyways and the parish gardens. But never forget: you are walking on the town's former ramparts.



Bust of André Messager (at the far end of the garden, looking over the pond). Born in Montluçon on December 30, 1853, Messager was one of the greatest composers of classic French operetta. He also played an important part in the history of music in general by updating and introducing new influences.



Hôtel de Charnisay

Overlooking the Jardin Wilson, the Hôtel de Charnisay dates back to the 17th and 18th centuries. In 1919, the owner Amable-Philippe Artuys, Baron de Charnisay, sold it to the town. Today it houses the Mupop (Museum of Popular Music) and the largest collection of musical instruments in France.



Porte Fouquet

(at the very end of n° 8, rue porte Fouquet)

In the 17th century, Louis XIV had his superintendent of finances, Nicolas Fouquet, imprisoned here.

Fouquet's mother, wife and three children were ordered to go to Montluçon and the Château de la Gaîté, on the outside of the city wall. To get to Saint-Pierre's church, Madame Fouquet had the former Cohelene gate reopened, hence the name Porte Fouquet.





6

Place de la fontaine

Rue de la fontaine

This fountain has been providing the town with drinking water for centuries. The water comes from the Conches spring via enamelled concrete piping that dates back to the Gallo-Roman period. Drinking fountains were added in the 19th century then it was restored to its original 15th century style with an octagonal basin.



Lintel - 5 rue de la Fontaine

Around the cross of Jerusalem as proof of pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre is a verse from psalm 70 of the Bible: « *In you Lord, I have put my trust, let me never be put to shame* ».

Alexandre de Beausson townhouse - 8 rue de la Fontaine

The Alexandre family has owned this property since 1575. The arched pediment and stone gate were added during renovation work carried out in the 17th century. Note the pelican feeding her babies with her own innards. According to tradition, this carving was ordered by a local inhabitant and Freemason with a Rose-Cross degree. The pelican, symbolising Christ giving his blood to save the people, is found on the pendant worn by Knights of the Rose-Cross.



7

Castle esplanade

I.S.M.H listed in 1926

Rebuilt in the late 14th century, an Italian-style gallery and clock tower were added during the 15th century. When the Duchy became part of the kingdom, the castle sank into oblivion before being transformed into barracks then finally restored in 1935.

The Mayor of Montluçon, Paul Constans, had the monumental stone stairway built to open up the castle to the town.

Saint-Diéry lions

in Volvic lava rock - Listed monument



Go down the lion steps, turn left into la rue Grande



8

Church of Notre-Dame

Listed monument

The church was rebuilt over a period running from the end of the 14th century to the end of the 15th century on the site of a roman church of which a part of the apsis is still visible. The facade with a slanting corner was designed so as not to obstruct the castle entrance. The listed 16th century stained glass indows of the wide Gothic openings were progressively restored. Work carried out during the 17th century mainly concerned the two doorways.



Works of art in Notre-Dame church

Christ awaiting crucifixion - Listed 15th century stone statue. (on the left as you enter)
Christ is seated, his hands tied with a crown of thorns upon his head. His suffering and resignation make this an extremely moving work which also reflects a new representation and meditation of the Passion.

Saint John the Baptist - Listed early 16th century polychrome stone statue.

The Precursor, in his camel hair clothing is carrying a lamb, the symbol of Christ and brandishing the Old Testament in his left hand. His delicate and regular features, long curly hair and his almond-shaped eyes have a piercing look.



Altarpiece - Listed 17th century carved gilded wood. The scene represents the Assumption. It is surrounded by four grooved columns topped with Corinthian capitals. The statue portrays Our Lady seated with Jesus with a pear in his hand. It was consecrated in 1656. « *Our Lady of Montluçon* » is celebrated each 8th of September for her benevolence.



Pietà - Listed mid-15th century stone statue.

The little that is left of the polychrome show the damage inflicted to most of the statues. This pietà is outstanding because of the virgin's posture with her hands folded but also the intricate work involved in the drapery. The statue is attributed to Jacques Morel, who came from Provence to work on Charles I and Agnès de Bourgogne's tomb in Souvigny between 1448 and 1453. The Pietà is a subject that originated in the Rhine and the Mendicant Orders.





Le passage du Doyenné

9

The passage takes its name from the doyen of the order of Saint-Nicolas. At the lower ends of the ribs of the vaulting are sculpted corbels. Some were restored in 1962.

There were once two churches on either side of the passageway: Saint-Louis' Chapel on the left, the buttresses of which still remain, and Saint-Nicolas' Church, located almost opposite Saint-Louis' Chapel. Saint-Nicolas' was completely destroyed after the Revolution.



Doyen's window

I.S.M.H. listed in 1926

Look up to the right to see the 13th century arched window with three tores over three colonnades with ornate capitals.



Did you notice?

Each colonnade is held up by a small figure representing a musician.

19TH CENTURY

Introduction

Montluçon experienced a second Golden Age during the 19th century with the coming of the first industrial revolution. A new town arose out of the iron and fire mix which aroused the interest of many famous names including George Sand and Napoleon III.

Already in the late 18th century in the region of Montluçon, on the edge of the Bourbonnais and the Berry regions, iron ore was being extracted and smelted using charcoal in the Forest of Tronçais, leading the way to a prosperous steel industry.

When the charcoal was replaced by coke to produce cast iron in the 19th century, Montluçon, thanks to its geographical location, entered a new industrial era.

As early as 1840, the town was at the crossroads of iron ore travelling by the canal, and the coal coming from the Commentry mine. The coal first arrived in wooden tipcarts, then from 1848 by small horse-drawn trains whose cable system made it possible to climb 175 metres.

This marked the renaissance of a town whose population increased tenfold in just one century, from 5,000 inhabitants in 1830 to 60,000 by the middle of the 20th century.







1

Place Jean Jaurès



The town hall and theatre were built between 1909 and 1913 on the site of the former Ursuline convent.

Théâtre Gabrielle Robinne

Located on the site of the former Ursuline chapel, building work was completed in 1913 and the theatre was officially opened on 17th January 1914. The Louis XVI- 1900-style facade includes three arched openings giving on to a balcony. Note the ornate sculptures above the windows.

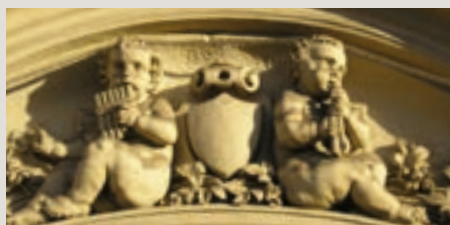
Montluçon-born Gabrielle Robinne was the most famous actress at the start of the 20th century. She was photographed 817 times! The theatre was named after her in 2006.



2

Around the Town Hall

Between 1792 and 1909, the municipal council met in the former Ursuline convent. In 1909 however the town demolished the convent to make way for the foundations of the present town hall which was officially opened in 1913.



Did you notice ? (4 Place Jean Jaurès).

Above the door is a high relief depicting two lovers back to back each playing an instrument. Look closely at the one on the right, he is playing a « *cabrette* », a type of traditional local bagpipes.



Law courts

At the turn of the 19th century, the law courts were located on the ground floor of the castle. The new courts were inaugurated in 1888, opposite the town hall.



N° 90 boulevard de Courtais

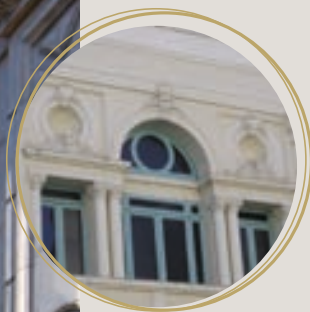
Neo-classical style facade. Triangular and curved pediments. Oculus on the top floor.

3

Around Forges Gate

Square de la Romagère

The chateau was built by Hélión Vincent Louis, Count of La Romagère, a rich 19th century industrialist. It was divided up into lots and sold to the town of Montluçon who planned the delightful 500 m2 square. The building is neo-Louis XIII style (brick facade with white surrounds).



N° 68 Former Baroque style « Café Riche »

At the beginning of the last century this was one of the smartest cafés to be seen in.



Did you notice ? (N° 49).
Three bas-reliefs above certain windows depicting scenes from everyday life.

4

Boulevard de Courtais

Formerly called « *Boulevard de Courtais* », this is the most important street of the town. Its name is linked to "General de Courtais", a glorious fighter during the Empire period, who was born in Montluçon in 1790. When he died in 1877, without childless, a part of his fortune came back to his nephew, the Viscount of Pailhou, who decided to build a sanatorium in Lavault-Sainte-Anne, a little village in the neighborhood of Montluçon. The "Boulevard de Courtais" is now a lively shopping street, where the inhabitants enjoy having a walk.

5

Avenue Marx Dormoy

On August 7, 1864, Napoleon III inaugurated the station and avenue that would bear his name until 1870. The name changed frequently until 1944 when it became Marx Dormoy.

Marx Dormoy

Born in Montluçon in 1888, he became mayor in 1926. Appointed undersecretary under Léon Blum, then Minister of the Interior, he played a leading role in the 1936 Matignon Agreements. He was assassinated during his sleep in Montélimar, where he was being held under house arrest, on July 25, 1941 (a bomb was placed under his bed).

N°1 | Central gabled dormer with the date 1902. Ogee door with two small saltimbanques.

N°9 | The dormer is rounded and surrounded by scroll-like ornaments which also acted as buttresses.

N°14 | Neo-Louis XIII style. Note the dormer and windows with stone mullions and transoms.

N°16 | Note the distinctive feature of this facade is the surrounds of the windows.

This type of construction is known as toothed quoins: the stones used alternate in width.

N°20 bis | This building was designed with canted sections forming the bay windows: closed and glazed protrusions on the facade.







6

On the corner of avenue Marx Dormoy

N° 20 ter

Neo-Louis XIII architecture with red and black brickwork. The construction date can be found on the coat of arms on the mullioned bay window (avenue Marx Dormoy : 1896).



N° 23

Tall and imposing art deco construction with arched bay windows at the top.



7

Avenue Jules Ferry

N° 6

The windows are decorated on both sides with ceramic tiles representing foliage tied to a ring. Note the mosaic frieze under the roof and the superb wrought iron balcony.

Collège Jules Ferry

This is where the Bernadine convent used to be. Built in 1631, it was confiscated during the Revolution and demolished in 1881. In 1884, the new school for boys was built. Now stands the Jules Ferry secondary school.





8

On the corner of avenue Jules Ferry

The former public baths

A work of the architect Pierre Diot from 1912, Diot designed a number of buildings in a similar style in Montluçon.

Note the floral motifs printed on the tiling and the white wood balustrades whose form is typical for the period. Much of the colourful and geometric art deco decoration makes up mosaics. The cartouches above the windows present sculptured foliage while the letters B and D (Bains Douches) are interlocking and clearly visible on the main facade.





N° 2

9

Around Saint-Pierre quarter

Flamboyant construction from the 20s in a neo-classical and art deco style.

N° 1 boulevard de Courtais - Les Mégalithes shop

Louis XIII architecture, with windows topped with triangular pediments and highly decorative sculpted foliage.

N° 2 boulevard de Courtais - Plus shop

Art deco. Floral decoration and lion heads a fleuron between their jaws decorate the windows.

Saint-Pierre bridge

The town's first bridge was built in the 15th century, rebuilt in 1879 then widened in 1910. In the 19th century, almost all the factories were located on the other side of the bridge, on the left bank of the Cher in what is known as Ville-Gozet and was the most highly populated area in Montluçon.



27

Town building

I.S.M.H listed 1999 by the architect Gilbert Talbourdeau. Its construction was initially decided in 1896 by the municipal council and Jean Dormoy. Just as for Saint-Paul's church, a project for a construction based around a metal structure was retained. It was a real place for the people with a community centre, union offices, a library and it also served hot meals to the workers thanks to its highperformance ovens.



Saint-Paul's church

Listed building 1985 - Built in 1864 by the celebrated architect Louis- Auguste Boileau. The cast iron support for the metal cupolas was cast in the Montluçon blast furnaces.





OTHER PLACES TO GO

Berry Canal

Work on the canal began in 1808 and ended in 1834. This relatively small water-way was mainly used to transport iron ore from Berry to the factories in Montluçon. Other materials were also carried along the canal, namely limestone, sand, tiles and wood. After 1885, the activity declined, principally due to competition from the rail network.

Officially abandoned in 1955, a few traces remain in the north. Thanks to the Berry Canal, its capacity and proximity with the extremely productive coal mines (in Commentry, 10 km from Montluçon), many factories were built on both banks of the Cher. Metalworks, chemical plants, glass factories, lime kilns... But all suffered the same fate as the canal. Fortunately for Montluçon, other companies arrived during the inter-war period: chemical and rubber industries with DUNLOP, high performance mechanics and high precision optics with SAGEM.



OTHER PLACES TO GO



Place de la Fraternité

Jardin Neillot

Named after the Fauve painter from Vichy (1898-1973). The lower area is a French-style garden with avenues of limes and cone-shaped yews around a pond and fountains, the upper area contains some superb specimens of Judas trees, magnolias, columnar oaks, tulip trees...





Avenue Henri de la Tourfondue

Parc Saint-Jean

30,000 m² of open spaces in which to stroll around and admire a giant sequoia measuring over 5 metres in circumference, lindens and liquidambers, while both children and adults will enjoy a break by the pond to watch the ducks and swans as they come to see if you have a treat for them.





OTHER PLACES TO GO



Avenue du Cimetière de l'Est

Parc de la Louvière

Parc de la Louvière Somewhere between a French and English-style garden with a large variety of trees: lime, kiwi, cypress, silverberry...





Rue des Faucheroix

Parc des Ilets

This area, where trees and shrubs predominate, became a public park in 1981 with pleasant paths for a stroll and shaded play areas.









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Opening hours

- All the year: From Monday to Saturday: 10:00 to 12:00 & 14:00 to 18:00
 - July and August: From Monday to Saturday: 9:30 to 12:30 & 13:30 to 19:00
- Sundays and public holidays: 9:00 & to 13:00



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