



Illiers- Combray

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Discovering
heritage



Illiers-Combray, muse town

Illiers-Combray occupies a privileged position at the crossroads of the Beauce and Perche regions. It nestles between hills and plains in a green setting criss-crossed by waterways. The remains of the medieval castle bear witness to the strategic importance of Illiers in the Middle Ages and its long history.

It was once owned by Florent d'Illiers (circa 1400-1475), a comrade-in-arms of Joan of Arc who played a decisive role in the liberation of Orleans. It was also thanks to his generosity that Saint-Jacques Church, listed as a Historic Monument, was rebuilt in the 15th century.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Illiers' economy, originally based on agriculture and crafts, grew rapidly through cereal cultivation, ideal in the Beauce region, and livestock farming in the neighbouring Perche region. This was coupled with a nationally renowned textile and leather industry, producing sheets and twill. Rue des Foulons, Rue des Caves and Rue des Forges all bear witness to these past activities. Numerous inns existed in the centre and on the outskirts: l'Auberge de la Croix Blanche, l'Hôtellerie de la Tête Noire, and others. However,



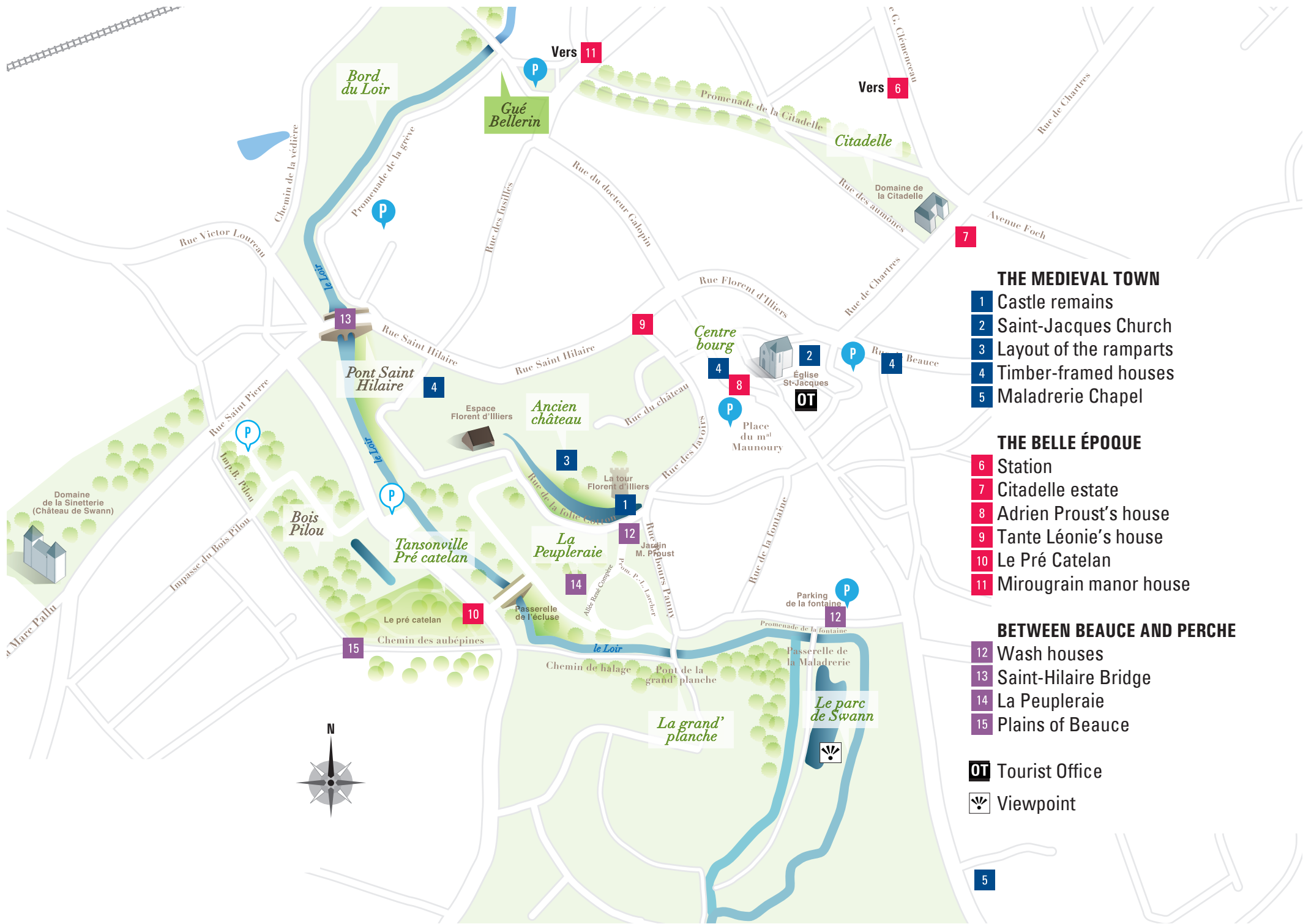
on the eve of the French Revolution, Illiers seems to have found itself in a difficult economic situation.

Illiers, Marcel Proust's childhood village (1871-1922), became Illiers-Combray in 1971, the centenary of the author's birth, in homage to the fictitious name given to the town in the novel *IN Search of Lost Time*. Every year, thousands of visitors discover the sites and landscapes that inspired the novelist: Tante Léonie's house, now a museum and certified a *Maison des Illustres*, the Pré Catelan garden created by his uncle Jules Amiot, the towpath along the Loir and the ruins of the thousand-year-old Folie Cotton tower. Through these sites, the Amiot and Proust families have left the town an architectural legacy and identity. The 19th century also saw the arrival of modernity in the town, thanks to the Clogenson-Greslou family. Close friends of Napoleon III, they played an important role in the arrival of the train, the telephone and the post office in Illiers.

In addition to the recently developed walks exploring the places that inspired Proustian works, Illiers-Combray is also a stopover for numerous bicycle routes, including the Boucle cœur beauperchois, the Vêloscénie and the Vallée du Loir à vélo. It is also an essential stopover on the cycle route to Santiago de Compostela.

Discover the town on nature walks along the Loir River and the GR35. A "factory of imagination", the town plunges visitors into a universe blending fiction, reality, nature, inspiration and discovery...





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OT Tourist Office

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5



1a



1b

- 1a. The medieval garden, near the remains of the old castle /
1b. A snow-covered castle tower

The medieval town

The town of Illiers developed in the Middle Ages thanks to its booming agriculture and textile and leather crafts. This crossroads of trade required the protection of the lords of Châteaudun. The town was built around three blocks: around the medieval castle, around Saint-Jacques Church, and around the now-defunct Saint-Hilaire Church, outside the ramparts. This explains the size of the old town centre.

1 The castle remains

The first castle at Illiers was built in 1019 by Geoffroy, Viscount of Châteaudun. It occupies the site of an ancient oppidum. The castle nestles in a meander of the Loir, which forms a natural moat. This fortress was the birthplace of Florent d'Illiers circa 1400, a comrade-in-arms of Joan of Arc who took part in the liberation of Orleans.

At the beginning of the 16th century, the outdated medieval castle was abandoned by its owners, who wanted to move to a more comfortable home. In the early 19th century, local residents dismantled the castle and used the stones to build new homes in the town. Only a few vestiges of this building remain today: two towers, part of the ramparts and the entrance pavilion to the high courtyard.



2a



2b



2c

2a. Saint-Jacques Church / 2b. The vaulted ceiling of Saint-Jacques Church / 2c. Saint-Jacques Church in days gone by

2 Saint-Jacques Church

Saint-Jacques Church, listed as a Historic Monument in 1907, was one of two churches in Illiers. Florent d'Illiers helped rebuild it after the Hundred Years' War. Completed in 1497, it features a remarkable nave covered by a 17th-century panelled roof with 19th-century painted decoration. The main portal is topped by a five-metre diameter rose window. The Saint-Jacques tower, never completed, houses three bells. In the second half of the 19th century, the church was completely restored and redecorated. The stained glass windows in the apse date from this period.

3 The layout of the ramparts

All that remains of the medieval castle and city walls are a few remnants and some stones identified on private property. Despite the disappearance of most of the city's defensive system, this past remains legible. In fact, this old layout forms walking circuit.

4 Timber-framed houses

The town still boasts a number of timber-framed houses dating from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Some have been extensively remodelled and covered with rendering. Some facades and corbels are still visible on Rue de l'Egout. While some half-timbered buildings in the hyper-centre are designed to be



4. A timber-framed house / 5. Old postcard: the Maladredie Chapel

seen, other half-timbered buildings are concealed by rendering, as is the case with some rural buildings in the suburbs. The latter are sometimes filled with raw earth, a technique known as “bauge”.

5 The Maladrerie Chapel

The Maladrerie Chapel is now privately owned. Although partly hidden by trees, it features a two-bay bell tower wall. It was probably founded in the 12th century. Isolated in the Middle Ages because they were contagious, lepers formed communities living on the fringe of town. However, if there were a large number of sufferers, they were allowed to use chapels to attend services. In 1313, Geoffroy, Lord of Illiers, approved a donation to the leprosy patients so that services could be held in the chapel. Masses were still celebrated here in the 16th century.



6. The station / 7. Pavilion at the corner of the Citadelle estate / 8. Adrien Proust's house

The Belle Epoque

In France, the late 19th century was a period of technological, economic, social and political progress. This period also saw the mark of Marcel Proust, who holidayed here with his aunt and uncle.

6 The station

In 2026, the little Illiers-Combray station will celebrate the 150th anniversary of its construction. The arrival of the train in Illiers was a major event, which brought the town into the modern age. Urbanisation around the station in the last years of the 19th century, with the construction of residences and shops, gave rise to the Bourgneuf district.

7 The Citadelle estate

The Domaine de la Citadelle is a Napoleon III-style mansion built around 1850. Over time, its owners turned it into an example of 19th-century modernity, installing gas, electricity, several bathrooms and the first central heating system. Its remarkable park, built in the spirit of the Parisian garden of Buttes-Chaumont, features a river with cascades and fountains, an incredibly ingenious rock garden using advanced techniques of the time, and other architectural treasures such as the summer pavilion.



9. La maison de Tante Léonie (musée Proust)

8 Adrien Proust's house

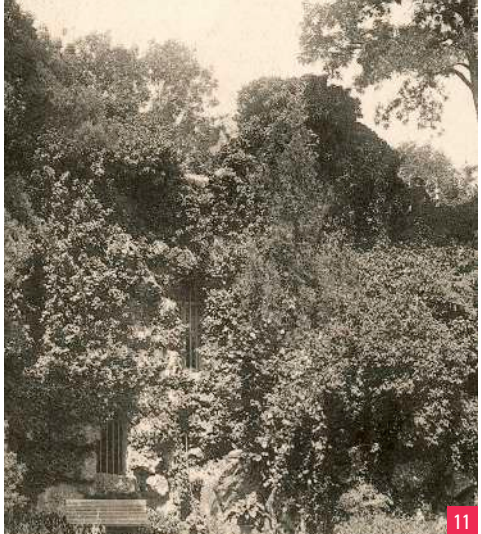
Adrien Proust (1834-1903), Marcel's father, was a French doctor who dedicated his career to fighting contagious diseases, having had to deal with the fourth cholera pandemic. The house where he was born, on Rue du Docteur Proust, is one of the town's landmarks. It features a portrait by Marie Nordlinger, a friend of Marcel Proust. This bas-relief once stood on the Proust family tomb in the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris.

9 Tante Léonie's house

Tante Léonie's house inspired Marcel Proust to write his 7-volume novel *À la recherche du temps perdu*. The house was once owned by Jules Amiot, a textile merchant in Illiers, and Elizabeth Amiot, Marcel Proust's paternal aunt. The writer stayed in this house during his holidays between 1877 and 1880. The garden-facing façade of this 19th-century bourgeois house, typical of the region, remains such as the writer and his uncle knew it, rendered and decorated with earthenware. The house is now home to the Marcel Proust Museum: an opportunity to discover the life and work of Marcel Proust.



10



11

10. The koubba, a pseudo-minaret, made of rendered bricks and covered with a zinc leaf dome / 11. Mirougrain amongst vegetation

10 Le Pré Catelan

This English-inspired garden was designed by Marcel Proust's uncle, Jules Amiot, a wealthy Illiers merchant. He acquired the land in 1863 and created an ornamental garden circa 1870, naming it the Pré Catelan after the one in the Bois de Boulogne. Inspired by his many stays in Algeria, he designed follies with oriental decor. Remains of the former Romanesque church of Saint-Hilaire d'Illiers, a grotto, oriental vases and statues complete the ensemble. This 7,000 m² area was classified as a Historic Monument in 1999 and a Remarkable Garden in 2004. The Pré Catelan is now owned by the Eure-et-Loir Department.

11 Mirougrain manor house

Illiers boasts many of the châteaux and private villas that feature in Proust's works. Among them, the Manoir de Mirougrain is undoubtedly the town's most unusual residence. It was the home of Juliette Joinville d'Artois, the poetess who inspired the character of Mlle Vinteuil, and its austere, fantastic facade is eye-catching:

it is covered with blocks of fieldstone.



12



13

12. Wash houses: promenade de la Fontaine / 13. Saint-Hilaire bridge

Between Beauce and Perche

The Loir rises at Saint-Eman, 5 kilometres upstream from Illiers-Combray. It marks the boundary between two very distinct landscapes: the hedged hills of the Perche to the west and the cereal-growing plains of the Beauce to the east. Here, the Loir begins a journey of over 300 kilometres, before flowing into the Sarthe, north of Angers.

12 The wash houses

The town boasts three public wash houses, two of which are noteworthy. The most recent has a washboard that can be moved according to the level of the Loir. The second, dating back to the end of the 18th century, has an inward-sloping roof, allowing it to be fed by rainwater, supplementing what comes from a spring.

13 Saint-Hilaire bridge

This bridge is located close to a passage, known as the Saint-Hilaire ford, which was built to cross the river. Until the French Revolution, the Saint-Hilaire bridge was the only link between two districts of Illiers, with very different fates. On one side, on the right bank of the Loir, lies the parish of Saint-Jacques, home to prosperous merchants, such as wealthy textile and



14



15a



15b

14. La Peupleraie / 15a. Les plaines de Beauce : la culture des céréales / 15b. La Beauce : la moisson des lentilles

wool merchants, opulent grain merchants, etc. Located in the Beauce region for its tax system, the parish depended on Orleans... On the left bank, the parish of Saint-Hilaire was home to tanners and a population of humble peasants. This parish, which was fiscally part of the Perche region, came under the authority of Alençon.

14 La Peupleraie

La Peupleraie Park is the link between the Pré Catelan Garden, Bois Pilou, Espace Florent d'Illiers and Parc de Swann. To mark the centenary of the Goncourt prize Marcel Proust received for *IN Search of Lost Time*, the 2018 winners of the Chaumont-sur-Loire International Garden Festival created an eponymous garden there.

15 The plains of Beauce

A path, dubbed "le petit raidillon" by Marcel Proust, offers glimpses of the Beauce plains. Covered in silt, a fine, fertile soil that's easy to work, they have always been ideal for agriculture, particularly cereal growing. Underneath, a permeable layer of limestone allows water to penetrate to the Beauce water table, which explains the absence of relief. Today, the open fields offer distant views.

Practical info

- **Town Hall**

11, rue Philebert Poulain
28120 Illiers-Combray
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www.illiers-combray.com

- **Tourist Office**

5, rue Henri Germond
28120 Illiers-Combray
Tel. 02 37 24 24 00
www.tourisme-entrebeauceetperche.fr

What to see and do

- **Tante Léonie's House**

4, rue du docteur Proust
28120 Illiers-Combray
Tel. 02 37 24 30 97
www.amisdeproust.fr

www.petitescitesdecaractere.com

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