



Epernon

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Epernon, quarry city

The town of Epernon was built on a rocky spur - from which it takes its name - overlooking a valley at the confluence of three rivers: the Drouette, the Guesle and the Guéville.

Human presence is attested as far back as the Neolithic period, but the town experienced its first growth in the Middle Ages. In the 11th century, Robert II, son of the French king Hugues Capet, had the first stone fortress built. Epernon's development on the border of two powerful duchies: the Duchy of Anjou and the Duchy of Normandy, and on the border with the Kingdom of France, attracted a great deal of interest and provided a defence network for these territories. Epernon grew on the slopes of the Diane, and the timber-framed houses testify to the town's commercial dynamism.

In the 17th century, Louis XIV breathed new life into Epernon. In 1674, Françoise d'Aubigné, the future Madame de Maintenon, purchased the entire estate: château, land, farms. Thanks to the financial support of King Louis XIV, the inns of Epernon, located on the Royal Road, were able to expand.



At the same time, to supply the fountains in the gardens of the Château de Versailles, the King began the construction of an aqueduct using the Epernon quarries. Stone quarrying, which dates back to Roman times, helped the town prosper from the 17th century to the early 20th century. The town's proximity to Paris and, above all, the arrival of the train in 1849 led to a boom in industrial activity, with the extraction of millstone and sandstone from local quarries. Epernon became one of the world's millstone capitals, and millstone factories multiplied. The town also supplied the Haussmann building sites in Paris and exported cobblestones throughout France. The factories employed up to 1,800 workers and the whole town lived off the industry for almost a hundred years.

Although the advent of modern flour mills rendered millstone mining obsolete at the beginning of the 20th century, Epernon retained its industrial culture and, from the 1950s onwards, attracted a number of industrial companies specializing in pharmaceuticals, electronic components, high-tech packaging and concrete research. These have made the town the third-largest business hub in the Eure-et-Loir region today.

For many years, the town has been committed to preserving and animating the city through cultural facilities such as the music school, the media library and the "Prairiales" cultural centre. Epernon is also renowned for its sporting vitality, with almost 3,000 registered members for a town of 5,600 inhabitants.



Epernon



Epernon, a medieval stronghold





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2



3a

1. View from the Diane Belvedere / 2. Les Pressoirs /
3a. Saint-Pierre Church

Epernon, a medieval stronghold

A strategic point on the border between the Duchies of Anjou and Normandy and the Kingdom of France, Epernon has long been a coveted site.

1 The Diane Belvedere

On this promontory stood the fortified castle of Epernon, built by Hugues Capet in the 11th century. The citadel was part of the royal estate's defensive belt against the Dukes of Normandy. Two enclosures protected the fort, with a 40-metre-high keep standing in the middle of the second enclosure. The castle was destroyed during the Hundred Years' War, and its stones were salvaged by the inhabitants to build the town.

2 Les Pressoirs, a former 12th-century wine cellar

The Salle des Pressoirs was used as a wine cellar by the nuns of the Notre-Dame-des-Hautes-Bruyères Priory in Saint-Rémy-l'Honoré in the Yvelines department. The room housed the minot, a large wooden measuring vessel, and two wooden presses used to extract grape juice from the vines grown on the hillsides. The nuns had a monopoly on the right to mine in Epernon, i.e. measuring foodstuffs, grains and vegetables in the town. The cellar was a market in itself; liquids such as wine, cider, oil, etc. were sold there.



3b

3b. The painted framework of Saint-Pierre church

3 Saint-Pierre Church

Listed as a Historic Monument on 26 May 1942 and mentioned as early as the 12th century, the Romanesque Saint-Pierre Church is located in the old town centre. It is the last of the five parish churches that existed before 1793. In June 1940, a bombing raid caused the partial collapse of the false stucco vaults dating from 1885, revealing the painted 16th-century panelled roof timbers. Under the choir, a wooden coffin rests in a vault; the epitaph engraved on a copper plate attributes the body to Anne Viallard, daughter of the Duke of Epernon, who died in the 17th century.

4 The half-timbered house, Place du Change

On the Place du Change, the economic centre of the town along with the Rue du Château, there is a timber-framed house built in the 15th century. Listed as a Historic Monument in 2011, it features a sculpted decoration on the street side: on the left, a statue of Saint Christopher carrying Christ on his shoulders and, on the right, a statue of the Archangel Gabriel, topped by a dove, evoking the Annunciation. On the courtyard side, the rubble construction is adorned with a high stair turret standing 11 metres tall. This house was used as a currency exchange office, replacing the many coins in circulation at the time with local currency for transactions.



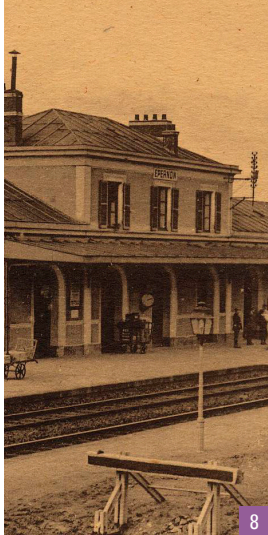
4. Modelling of the timber framing / 5. The alleys and ramparts of Epernon / 6. Le prieuré Saint-Thomas

5 Alleys and ramparts

The ramparts built in the 12th century, following the town's expansion, overlooked a moat in the past. This was filled in from the 18th century onwards with backfill from nearby sandstone quarries. The town subsequently acquired these plots and transformed them into the thoroughfare that led to the allotments in the 19th century.

6 Saint Thomas Priory

Founded in the 11th century, Saint-Thomas Priory depended on the Benedictine abbey of Marmoutier, near Tours. Monks earned their income from the land they owned and the taxes they levied. As Epernon was a stopover between Chartres and Santiago de Compostela, the monks welcomed pilgrims. The priory was sold during the French Revolution and occupied by various industrialists until 1936. Today, the religious community of the Congregation of the Sisters of Christ ensures the continuity of this place of welcome for pilgrims and opens the park for visitors to walk in.



7. The Epernon quarries and rock face / 8. The station

Epernon, an industrial town

The quality of Epernon's quarries has been renowned since Antiquity. In the 18th century, Epernon developed a major industry with the quarrying of millstone and sandstone. It has preserved this working-class and industrial culture to this day.

7 The Epernon quarries and rock face

At the entrance to a former sandstone quarry, the three-metre-high quarry face is particularly clear. In these open-cast quarries, extraction was barely or not at all mechanised. It was slave labour, done by hand. Quarrying reached its peak in the 19th century and only disappeared in the 1960s. Millstone was extracted south of La Drouette River.

8 The station and the market hall

The construction of the railway station and the western line in 1849 would be decisive for Epernon's economic development. The cobblestones that would make up 75% of Paris' streets left from this station. This is also where the famous Epernon millstones, whose hardness and strength are world-renowned, were loaded. They were then shipped all over the world.



9



10



11

9. The Lock and King's Canal / 10. The Millstone and Cobblestone Museum / 11. The Main Cerib building

9 The lock and the King's Canal

During the construction of the Maintenon Aqueduct, Louis XIV commissioned Vauban to build a canal to speed up work by transporting stones by water. Long known as the King's Canal, it now bears the name of Drouette, one of the rivers from which it draws its water.

10 The Millstone and Cobblestone Museum

Sandstone and millstone quarrying was the region's main industrial activity between 1850 and the 1960s. It left a lasting mark on the history of Epernon. With its abundant collection of tools, testimonials and original documents, the Millstone and Cobblestone Museum tells the story of this surprising human adventure and industrial saga.

11 The Main Cerib building

Cerib is an industrial technical centre specialising in research and innovation for the concrete industry. The main building was constructed in 1970 by architects D. Maunoury and M. Bréant; its glass panels are the work of Eurelian master glassmaker Jacques Loire. In 2016, the building was awarded the "Architecture Contemporaine Remarquable" label.



13. The meadow

A holiday resort just outside the capital

The arrival of the train in the 19th century enabled new inhabitants to come from Paris, in search of a privileged setting and leisure activities. Epernon, nestled in a green setting, offers many attractions.

12 Diane's Wood

Epernon lies to the south of the Rambouillet Forest. It was once a hunting reserve, which explained the hundreds of Parisian hunters who came to Epernon every weekend by train. From the plateau, paths lead to Diane's Wood, the southern threshold of the Rambouillet Forest.

13 The meadow

Epernon was built overlooking a marshy valley. In the 19th century, with the railway station nearby, the land was coveted by the Parisian bourgeoisie for the construction of eclectic-style houses. Part of the meadow has remained untouched and is today a popular place for Epernon's inhabitants to take a stroll.



14



15



16

14. The Savonnière estate / 15. The town hall / 16. First house on the left, Maître Boiffard's town house

14 The Savonnière estate

The hamlet of Savonnière developed in the 19th century. One of the directors of Le Bon Marché department store in Paris and his wife, Madame Kelsen, had a house and outbuildings built, as well as a model farm, a place of technological and agricultural innovation. Part of the estate has disappeared, but the farm's sheepfold and rotunda remain. The rotunda corresponds to the Normandy pavilion presented at the 1900 Paris World's Fair. This pavilion was dismantled and rebuilt in Epernon. It became a threshing floor and now houses the "conservatoire des meules et pavés" (Millstone and Cobblestone Museum).

15 The Town Hall

This mansion, known as the "château des tourelles", was built in 1887 for a Parisian butcher. Its architecture is characteristic of the inventiveness of the 19th century, blending modern techniques with styles freely inspired by the past. This private mansion has housed the town hall since 1980, and part of the former estate is now occupied by the secondary school.

16 Maître Boiffard's town house

Maître Boiffard, a notary in Epernon, was a regular at La Coupole, one of Paris's trendiest cafés, frequented by artists such as George Braque, Guillaume Apollinaire,



17a



17b



18

17a. The swimming pool / 17b. The pool from above / 18. La Pergola multimedia library

Pablo Picasso and Marc Chagall. He opened the door to his private mansion in Epernon, where he organised receptions. Many artists thus frequented the town.

17 The swimming pool

The Epernon swimming pool was built in 1935 by members of the Amicale laïque d'Epernon association . The second-largest Olympic swimming pool in France, it was dug by members of the association in their spare time.

18 La Pergola multimedia library

Opening in 2019, the La Pergola multimedia library is located in a flood zone. This constraint was a source of inspiration for the Mu agency. Built on stilts to limit its environmental footprint, and opened up by large windows, the multimedia library blurs the boundaries between inside and outside. Artist Rafaëlle Ishkinazi's frescoes represent the city's heritage on the ceilings of the multimedia library, embodying the meeting of minds intended by the architects.

In 2020, the building was awarded the Coup de Cœur by the jury of the Grand Prix Livres Hebdo des Bibliothèques, won over by the brightness, modernity and serenity of the space.

Practical info

● Tourist Office

1 rue Bourgeoise,
28230 Epernon
Tel: 02 37 23 05 04
www.tourismeporteseureliennes.fr

● Town Hall

8 rue du Général Leclerc,
28230 Epernon
Tel: 02 37 83 40 67
contact@ville-epernon.fr
www.ville-epernon.fr

What to see and do

● The Millstone and Cobblestone Museum

23 avenue de la Prairie,
28230 Epernon
Tel : 06 23 82 99 08
meulesetpaves@gmail.com
www.epernonpatrimoine.com

*Open from 1 May to 30 September: Saturday afternoons,
Sundays and public holidays.*

- Discovery tour: Epernon, the medieval town
- Discovery tour: Epernon, an industrial town
- Two cycle routes: la Véloscénie, Paris - Mont Saint-Michel; Saint-Jacques à vélo (Santiago de Compostela)

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