



Levroux

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heritage



Levroux, city of leather and parchment

In the 2nd century B.C., a Celtic village developed on the plain on the site of the current Arènes district. A 10-year-long archaeological dig revealed traces of dwellings and craftsmen's workshops. The population of this village then moved to La Colline des Tours, where they built an oppidum, a new settlement with ramparts extending over 20 hectares. Little by little, dwellings spread out beyond the ramparts onto the plain.

Saint Martin (4th century) introduced Christianity to Levroux: he cured lepers and destroyed a pagan temple. Levroux was then called "vicus leprosus", a name that evoked the town's tradition of hospitality. Other sources attest to Saint Silvain and Saint Silvestre being worshipped in Levroux as early as the 8th century. Legend has it that Saint Sylvain (the current patron saint of the collegiate church) and Saint Silvestre, accompanied by Saint Rodène, were sent by Saint Pierre to evangelise the Berry province. In Levroux, they healed the sick and destroyed idol worship.



In 1012, Eudes, Prince of Déols and Lord of Levroux, gave the part of the town closest to the church to a College of Canons so they could found a chapter. The canons cared for the sick, and major pilgrimages developed, linked to the spectacular rise in the worship of the saints. All this activity favoured trade and the city's growth.

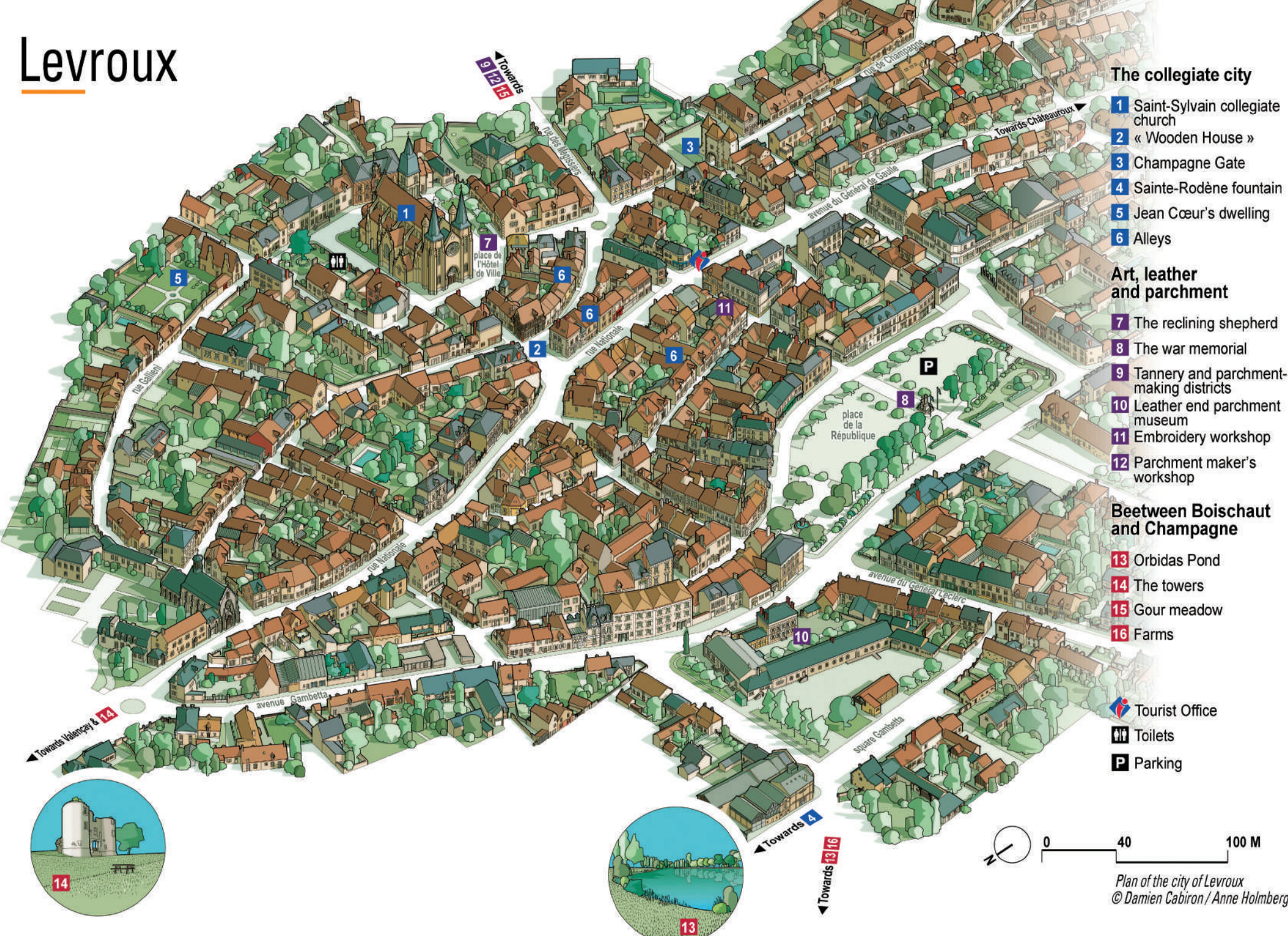
In the 19th century, Levroux became a Mecca for leather and parchment work. International competition and the use of substitute materials took their toll on the tanners, but today there are still two flourishing companies operating in the luxury industry. A traditional parchment workshop, one of only two left in France, is a reminder of the tradition that craftsmen make it their duty to pass on.

Sandstone, limestone and timber frame coexist, as these materials are readily available in the surrounding area. Today, the eye is drawn to the architectural details that bear witness to the succession of eras: medieval houses - including the exceptional "wooden house" -, large stone portals, porches, expressive dormer windows, the small homes of tannery workers, etc.

Levroux is a gastronomic and festive town, and is particularly lively during the Christmas market and Easter fair. On this occasion, it's also possible to taste the local speciality, Easter pâté, as well as potato pancakes and goat's cheese.



Levroux



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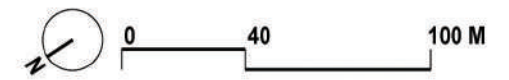
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1a. The collegiate church / 1b. The organ, listed as a Historic Monument since 1908 / 2a. The “wooden house”

The collegiate city

At the end of the 12th century, construction began on a vast church, the present-day collegiate church. It is the central point around which the medieval city is built.

1 Saint-Sylvain collegiate church

The collegiate church was administered by a College of Canons. The latter encouraged its construction so they could accommodate the sick and pilgrims who came to visit the relics of Saint Sylvain. The college also administered the surrounding neighbourhood, formerly known as Châteauvieux-lès-Levroux. King Philippe le Hardi of France (son of Saint Louis) attended the mass marking the completion of work in 1280. The organ case (1b) and stalls date from the Renaissance. The building was listed as a Historic Monument in 1840, and underwent partial restoration in the 19th century. The stained glass windows were partly created by Lucien Léopold Lobin’s workshop in Touraine.

2 The “wooden house”

The “Maison Saint-Jacques” or “Hôtel des Pèlerins”, also known as the “Wooden House”, was built



2b. The shields / 3. In the background, the Champagne Gate before restoration / 4. The avenue of trees leading to the fountain

between 1492 and 1495. It is fine example of the timber-framed architecture of the Indre department. It was listed as a Historic Monument in 1922. The shields of France, Brittany and Dauphiné, held by cherubs, are carved in honour of Charles VIII, Anne de Bretagne and their son, the short-lived Dauphin Charles-Orland (2b). The three sides of the corner post depict a crouching figure with his hands on his head, a jester carrying his marotte, flanked by an ox, a ram and a wild man, covered in hair symbolized by scales, with a club in his hands.

3 The Champagne Gate

In 1436, King Charles VII authorized the canons, Bertrand de la Tour d'Auvergne, Lord of Levroux, and the town's inhabitants to fortify the town. As the only remaining trace of the medieval city walls, the Champagne Gate today marks the separation between the town's ancient heart and its modern extension. The gate was originally protected by a drawbridge and a system of machicolations in its central curtain wall. The towers have loopholes and gunports to protect access to the town.

4 Sainte-Rodène Fountain

he fountain dedicated to Saint Rodène has been venerated since time immemorial. An inscription from 1688, more difficult to decipher, invites pilgrims to



5a



5b

5a. Jean Cœur's dwelling / 5b. Jean Cœur's dwelling's door

draw water from the fountain to obtain graces from Saint Sylvain. The statue dominating the small building, once surmounted by a canopy, dates from the 19th century. The fountain's waters are reputed to cure headaches, convulsions, skin diseases, eye problems, restore fertility to barren women, fortify children and encourage success in examinations. Non-drinking water.

5 Jean Cœur's dwelling

Jean Cœur (1422-1483), son of Jacques Cœur, Grand Argentier to King Charles VII, became Dean of the College of Canons at Levrux in 1443. He lived in the city until 1450, when, appointed archbishop at just 25, he left for Bourges, where he remained until his death. Construction of the dwelling dates back to the early 1440s. Two stone chimneys rise to a height of 13 and 15 metres respectively. Private property.

6 Alleys

The winding layout of the alleyways, former paths linking farm buildings, is a legacy of medieval times and is characteristic of the town of Levrux.



7a



7b



8

7a. The reclining shepherd / 7b. Ernest Nivet, circa 1909 /
8. The war memorial, classified as a Historic Monument in 2020

Art, leather and parchment

Levroux perpetuates its hospitable vocation towards the craftsmen and artists who contribute to its renown.

7 The reclining shepherd

Levroux-born sculptor Ernest Nivet (1871-1948) worked in Auguste Rodin's studio for a time. He first exhibited the plaster cast of this work at the 1906 Salon des Artistes Français, where it won a medal. The pastoral theme nourished his creativity, as he produced three shepherds in various attitudes before the First World War. The Levroux stone shepherd dates from the 1930s. Created for Abbott Berger, priest-herbalist in Rouvres-Les-Bois (Indre), it was later donated to the town of Levroux.

8 The war memorial

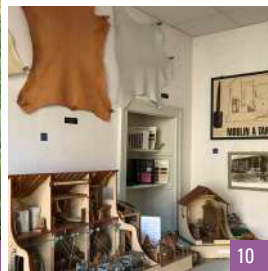
Ernest Nivet, in collaboration with departmental architect Louis Suard, built the monument in 1920. This is the first commemorative sculpture executed by the artist in the aftermath of the Great War. He honours the 150 dead of his hometown. Veteran Ernest Nivet depicts a soldier from 1914-1918, a "poilu", his head resting on his palm, his gaze turned to the ground, in a pensive attitude.



9a



9b



10

9a. Le quartier des mégissiers / 9b. Le jardin des mégissiers / 10. Le musée du cuir et du parchemin

9 The tannery and parchment-making districts

Levroux, in the heart of the Champagne Berrichonne region, a natural breeding ground for sheep, has been involved in hide tanning since ancient times. The heyday of the mégisseries (tanneries for small hides) and parchment factories (treatment of hides without tanning for use in writing and bookbinding) was between 1850 and the 1980s.

The water essential to working with skin encouraged the establishment of buildings along the river Cephons. They feature characteristic wooden architecture, with one or two clerestory floors to provide the ventilation needed to dry the hides. Today, two mégisseries ensure the perpetuation of this activity, supplying exceptional leathers that are used by the great Parisian fashion houses. One of them retains a parchment-making activity that is unique in France.

10 The leather and parchment museum

Since 1982, the Musée du Cuir et du Parchemin (Leather and Parchment Museum) has been showcasing the know-how that has contributed to Levroux's identity. Old tools and machines used to transform hides into leather or parchment are exhibited. Three models recreate scenes from an industry that was Levroux's main activity for several centuries.



11



12

11. The embroidery workshop / 12. The parchment maker's workshop.

11 The embroidery workshop

In 1988, Annie Penin began training in fashion design in Montreal. She perfected her technique at the Lesage school. In 1999, she was commissioned to create a stage costume for Céline Dion. Continuing her collaboration with the singer for almost ten years, she also worked with Cirque du soleil, as well as with various couturiers and luxury couture designers.

Back in France, she began teaching at the Lesage school in 2011, setting up her own embroidery business at the same time. In 2021, she opened her own workshop-boutique in Levroux. As well as selling and creating, the embroiderer offers courses and workshops.

12 The parchment maker's workshop

Parchment is a natural product whose manufacture has been part of Levroux's history for almost two centuries. Levroux is home to one of the last two traditional parchment workshops in France. The medieval framing used here enables illuminators, calligraphers and other craftsmen to use a high-quality product. The Levrousain workshop, dedicated to preserving and transmitting this technique, is open to visitors. Demonstrations by the son of Levroux's last parchment-maker enable visitors to discover the complete parchment-making cycle.



13



14a



14b

13. Orbidas Pond / 14a. The towers / 14b. Concert on the hill, in front of the towers.

Between Boischaut and Champagne

Levroux is located on the border of two territories. The North Boischaut is characterized by a gently undulating landscape, traditionally devoted to livestock farming. To the south, the Champagne Berrichonne region stretches out across vast plains home to wheat, lentil and black truffle cultivation as well as the Reully vineyards.

13 Orbidas Pond

One of Levroux's green spaces is the Orbidas Pond. Close to the campsite, swimming pool and town centre, this body of water is an ideal place for Levroux's residents to relax. The area also attracts many fishermen. The town of Levroux has a number of squares, small woods and tannery gardens to green up its town centre...

14 The towers

The hill has seen intense human occupation since the 1st century BC, with the installation of a Gaulish oppidum (city with ramparts), a new agglomeration following that of the Arènes and covering some 20 hectares. The rampart that encircles it corresponds to Julius Caesar's description of the Bourges rampart. The towers are the remains of the gatehouse of the last château built in the 15th century. An earlier



15



16a



16b

15. Development of the Gour meadow / 16a. Levroux livestock / 16b. Levroux cheese

château, dating back to the 11th-12th centuries, was built by Eudes I de Déols, replacing the “Châteauvieux” in the collegiate church district. The area regularly hosts cultural events (14b).

15 The Gour meadow

A hedge has been planted around the tannery springs by a group of local residents, at the instigation of the town and the CPIE Brenne. 80 plants have been planted here: blackthorn, hawthorn, hazelnut, etc. The natural cycle is respected via late mowing. This enables plants to germinate, facilitates the establishment of fragile plants and encourages pollination.

16 The farms

The Levroux region is home to a number of goat farms. This has enabled the production of goat’s cheese since time immemorial. In 1981, under the impetus of Abbot Barreau and storyteller Jean-Louis Boncœur, the Commanderie des fromages de Levroux en Berry chapter was founded. Its aim is to promote a pyramid whose truncated top, according to legend, evokes the collegiate church’s bell tower. The Levroux pyramid is rich in the fragrance of the grass grazed by the “chieuvres de cheu nous”. TV presenter Stéphane Bern was made an honorary member of the Commanderie on 14 April 2022.

Practical info

- **Town Hall**
10 place de l'hôtel de ville
36110 Levroux
Tel. 02 54 35 70 54
accueil@levroux.fr
www.levroux.fr
- **Tourist Office**
10 rue nationale
36110 Levroux
Tel. 02 54 22 88 20
tourisme@levroux.fr

What to see and do

- **Leather and parchment museum**
3 rue Gambetta
36110 Levroux
Tél. 02 54 22 88 20
*Visits by appointment.
Group visits possible.*
- **Parchment maker's workshop**
rue du château d'eau
36110 Levroux
Tél. 02 54 22 88 20
*Visits by appointment.
Group visits possible.*

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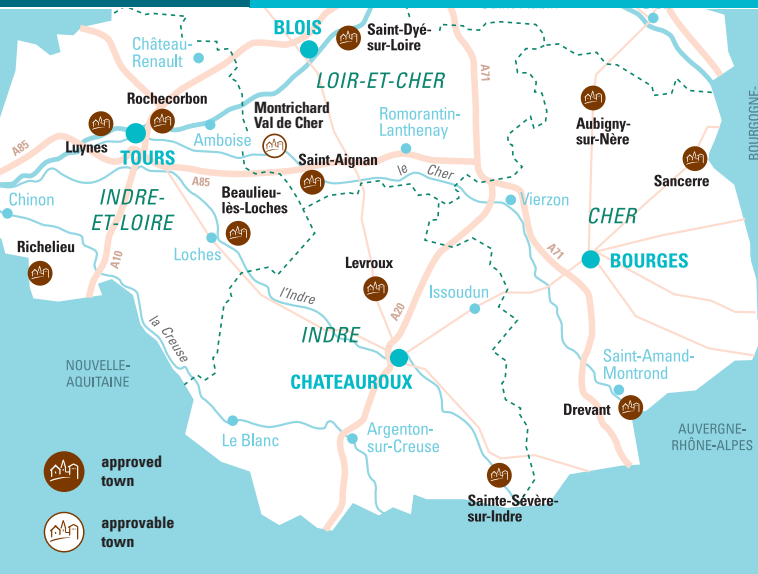
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