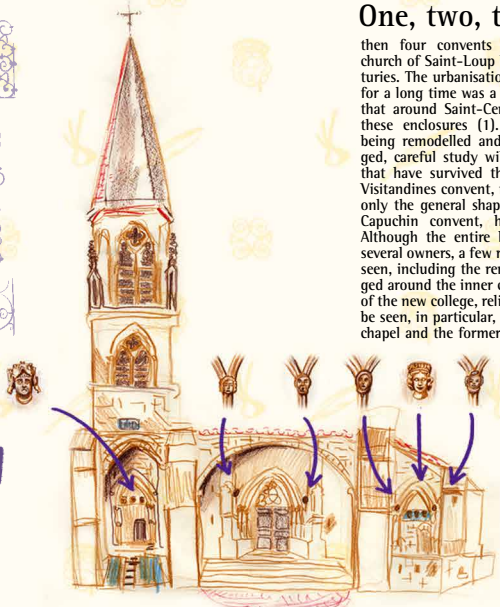


So how did "Sainted Billom" (2) become a major religious centre that attracted all these congregations? During the Middle Ages, more specifically, at the end of the first crusade, two canons from Billom brought the relic of the "Precious Blood" (3) back to Billom. From then on until the time of the French Revolution, the veneration of the "Precious Blood", kept in the collegiate church of Saint-Cerneuf, gave rise to pilgrimages, and to a huge annual procession. These gatherings brought riches to the Saint-Cerneuf quarter, breeding hostility from the neighbouring village grouped around the church of Saint-Loup. Far from these local quarrels, in 1555, the Jesuits were the first to settle, followed by the Capuchins in 1559, the Benedictines in 1620, and finally the Visitandines in 1650.



SAINTÉ

- 1 Convents are also called enclosures.
- 2 Nickname given to Billom.
- 3 Ampulla said to have contained a small amount of the blood of Christ, which was brought back from the Holy Land.



One, two, three,

then four convents were established around the church of Saint-Loup between the 17th and 18th centuries. The urbanisation of this area of Billom, which for a long time was a town in its own right, rivaling that around Saint-Cerneuf, still bears the traces of these enclosures (1). Today, despite the convents being remodelled and having their functions changed, careful study will reveal architectural elements that have survived the centuries. For instance, the Visitandines convent, now a retirement home, retains only the general shape of the original building. The Capuchin convent, however, has been preserved. Although the entire building has been sold off to private owners, a few remodelled buildings can still be seen, including the remains of the chapel, still arranged around the inner courtyard. Within the perimeter of the new college, relics of the Jesuit College can still be seen, in particular, the quadrilateral formed by the chapel and the former cloister.

Le premier collège des Jésuites implanté en France

Georges Bataille (Billom 1897 - Orléans 1962) *Ecrivain inclassable, en perpétuelle recherche, passant du catholicisme au marxisme, souvent provocateur quand il aborde des thèmes comme la sexualité, la morale ou la mort. Son œuvre est restée longtemps confidentielle puis réservée à un cercle d'initiés. Dans ses récits, romans, essais critiques, ou poèmes il a inlassablement tenté de mettre à jour « son expérience intérieure ».*

En 1545, Guillaume Duprat alors évêque de Clermont, et seigneur de Billom, est envoyé par le roi François 1^{er} au Concile de Trente pour représenter la France. Lors de cette assemblée, il rencontre Ignace de Loyola ou Claude Le Jay, les fondateurs de la compagnie de Jésus. Ensemble, ils vont discuter et trouver un accord qui leur permet réciproquement de se placer politiquement. Guillaume Duprat laisse à disposition de la compagnie de Jésus des terrains à Billom pour construire le premier collège des Jésuites en France. En faisant cela, il promet sa région, l'Auvergne. Ignace de Loyola trouve, quant à lui, l'occasion d'implanter la congrégation religieuse en France et donc de développer sa compagnie de Jésus sur ce territoire.

La fondation de la compagnie à Billom sera effective dès 1555 et la première pierre du collège des Jésuites dans cet établissement, le premier construit en France, la « bosse des maths » est inutile, ce sont les lettres qui sont à l'honneur : la rhétorique (1), les humanités (2), la grammaire et... le théâtre. Lors de sa construction,

TOWNS AND VILLAGES OF CHARACTER IN THE LIVRADOIS FOREZ

The heritage of the Livradois-Forez Regional Nature Park is rich. It is made up of a network of towns, and big and small villages. Economic activity consists of agriculture, forestry, crafts and industry. The spatial organization of these activities goes back, for the most part, to the Middle Ages and produced, from the 14th century on, an interesting, and sometimes remarkable, urban architecture. The Parc Naturel Régional Livradois-Forez assists the communes in their efforts to revitalize those urban centres that are particularly interesting.



Parc naturel régional Livradois-Forez
63880 St-Gervais-sous-Meymont
Tel: + 33 (0)4 73 95 57 57
www.parc-livradois-forez.org

SAVANTÉ

- 1 Art de bien parler
- 2 Études des langues anciennes : latin et grec

ADRESSES UTILES

Maison du tourisme du Livradois-Forez
Bureau d'information de Billom
13 rue Carnot 63160 Billom
04 73 68 39 85
contact.billom@vacances-livradois-forez.fr
www.vacances-livradois-forez.com

Juillet août
Du lundi au samedi de 10h - 12h30
14h30-18h
Dimanche et jour férié : 10h-12h30

De Pâques à Toussaint
et petites vacances scolaires
Du lundi au vendredi de 10h-12h30
14h30-17h - Sam 10h-12h30

Hors saison : Lun et sam : 10h-12h30,
mar mer ven 10h-12h30 14h30-17h

Pays d'Art et d'Histoire de Billom communauté
rue des boucheries - 63160 Billom
Tél : 04 73 79 88 26 / 06 25 23 92 61



Crédit photographique : C. Roudet - M. Leblond
- LUTRA phototypique
Impression : Chambrial-Cavanat 63160 Billom



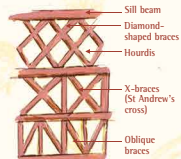
CHARMING TOWNS AND CITIES IN THE LIVRADOIS-FOREZ



Narrow cobbled streets

lined with half-timbered houses and small shops, sculpted portals, mullioned windows that catch the eye of passersby; the walls of today's historic town tell us tales of Billom's Medieval past.

Medieval Billom, a major heritage site in the Auvergne, currently the subject of protective measures, bears witness to a rich political, commercial, intellectual and religious past. By the early 12th century, the town had become episcopal (1), changing hands from the Counts of Auvergne to the Bishops of Clermont. In 1180, Bishop Pons granted a charter of franchise (2) to the inhabitants of Billom. From then on, they were authorised to elect consuls to administer their town, run a Common House (3) and, above all, build an enclosure (4) around the church of Saint-Cerneuf. Bolstered by these privileges, Billom was named a "Bonne Ville" of Auvergne, along with 18 other towns (Clermont, Riom, Issoire, Cusset, Brioude, etc.). These towns met to reflect on common affairs and, together, they played a key role in defending the Auvergne during the Hundred Years' War. The town also lies at the heart of an area labelled as "Pays d'art et d'histoire" (region of art and history) since 2010.



- ### MÉDIÉVALE
- 1 Town belonging to a bishop; Billom was bestowed on Philip Augustus, King of France, after the latter's victory in the Auvergne over the English.
 - 2 Privileges granted to the people of Billom.
 - 3 The Common House is equivalent to the present-day Town Hall.
 - 4 These fortifications may have protected Billom against raids and looting during the Hundred Years' War.
 - 5 A listed building is legally protected by the heritage department of the Ministry of Culture. As such, its owner cannot carry out any work without expert advice. In return, they may be eligible for public grants for restoration work. Buildings registered as being of historical importance face fewer administrative constraints, but also have fewer advantages, than do buildings that are classified as historical monuments. Owners must notify the authorities of their intention to carry out any work.
 - 6 The hourdis is the plaster fill that covers the timber frame. It can be made of various materials such as earth and flint cob.
 - 7 Horizontal wooden elements used as a transition between the timber frame and the masonry.

The Pont du Marché, Creux du Marché, Place du Marché au Chanvre, Place de la Halle:



Every Monday morning, on market day, and for the famous pink garlic fair held on the second weekend of August, the town's streets vibrate with the noise and bustle of the many fairs and markets that have shaped Billom's identity since its very beginning. Billom's reputation as a trading hub would appear to date right back to its founding, since the town's Celtic name, "Billomagus", was formed from the radical "mag" meaning "market".

MARCHANDE

- 1 The study of place names.
- 2 Large wooden tubs used to collect grapes at harvest time.
- 3 Stone markers marking the distance of one mile (1.4815 km) along Roman roads.



Most of the timber-framed houses in the historic centre of Billom, dating from the 15th and early 16th centuries, are listed or registered in the French Supplementary Historic Monument List (5). They are of fairly simple construction; an assembly of wood elements infilled with cob (6). Vertical elements are supported by sills (7); additional bracing elements, in the form of simple, oblique or X-shaped crosses, are then integrated into this vertical structure in order to brace the building. These wood elements form a variety of geometric patterns depending on how they are arranged. As these houses were very often used for trade, the ground floor shops open onto the street through flat-arched bay windows. On the front of the buildings, the floors of the houses are sometimes offset, the upper level "advancing" over the lower level, forming overhangs called corbels.

You don't have to undertake lengthy toponymic research (1) to identify the intense trading activity that has enlivened the Angaud district for several centuries. During the Middle Ages, a host of merchants and craftsmen, such as the guilds of butchers, weavers, clog makers, blacksmiths, dyers and tanners, settled along the banks of the Angaud. Up to the 19th century, Billom was still nicknamed "the market town" because you could sell or buy anything here: butter, eggs and cheese, cattle of all kinds, poultry of all types, and also wood, clogs, bachelors (2), earthenware pots, hemp, wool yarn, etc. The wheat market was held under the Market Hall, built rather late for a trading town, between 1793 and 1795 and demolished around 1970, the memory of which lives on in the name of its square. Trading developed strongly due to the major roads and thoroughfares serving Billom. Milestones (3) in the vicinity of Billom indicate that in Gallo-Roman times, the town bordered the road linking Lyon to Bordeaux. Later, in the 16th century, soldiers used a "Grand Chemin" to go from Saint-Flour in the Cantal to Billom. In the following centuries, new roads were opened, linking the town to the Forez, and then to Courpière.



BILLOM MÉDIEVAL

1 Porte des Boucheries or Porte de la Prévôté

Billoom built its first city wall in the 12th century. Two of the original city gates remain today, one in Rue de l'Évêché, the second at the bottom of the Rue des Boucheries. The latter, a Romanesque gateway with a semi-circular arch, was one of the two main gates and is an iconic passageway into the heart of the Medieval quarter.

2 Rue des Boucheries

The Rue des Boucheries leads to the Saint Cerneuf district and forms a main road within the first wall. During the Middle Ages, craftspeople and tradespeople were grouped into specific streets or districts. This quarter, for instance, was home to the butchers' guild. With no worries about passersby, butchers happily set up their tools in the middle of the street to kill cattle and scald them in large vats, the water of which they poured into the central gutter. Don't miss at the bottom of the Rue des Boucheries, metal hooks used to hang legs and carcasses.

3 Maison du Boucher opposite the premises of the PAH

This is a 15th century civil building which is thought to have belonged to a member of the butchers' guild. Its trading purpose is clear from its shop entrance and a stall overlooking the Rue du Puits (on the building's left-hand corner). Don't miss the wear of the arkeose column on the corner of the building is thought to be due to butchers sharpening their tools. If you look closely you can see the shape of the blades in the stone.

4 Maison du Doyen

This late 16th century building has a shop window made of andesite stone, remarkable for its size, and a pedestrian door framed with mouldings. Note the lovely mullioned and transomed windows on the first floor. Don't miss the relics of the Romanesque church in the chevet of the Collegiate Church. The semi-circular arches are framed by grey, black and ochre mosaics and rosettes characteristic of Auvergne Romanesque decoration, made of local stones of various colours.

BILLOM SCHOLARLY

1 Maison du Chapitre (don't miss the plate)

Listed as a historic monument, this house, known as the "Chapter House", was built sometime between the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Its name recalls the presence of the Chapter of Saint-Cerneuf in the 13th century. Following restoration campaigns, the facade, consisting of arkeose, blocks and dressed stone, has retained its original appearance with its entrance door, two flat-topped shop arches and its original windows. The small central windows indicate that there used to be a spiral staircase inside.

2 La porte de l'Évêché (rue de l'Évêché)

The 12th century Porte de l'Évêché was one of the gateways to the Medieval town and marked the boundary of the first fortified wall at the end of the 12th century. Don't miss: the Misericorde retirement home (on the right at N° 4, Rue de l'Évêché). This is a beautiful group of buildings built at various periods (16th, 18th and 19th centuries). During the 20th century, they were purchased by the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy.

5 Maison Bailli, dating from the 15th and 16th century

According to a recent designation, this building belonged to a bailli, an agent of the Bishop of Clermont responsible for administrative and judicial affairs. Responsible for the keys to the town, the bailli locked the gates in the walls every evening to keep Billoom safe from brigands and threats.

6 Maison de l'Échevin, Rue Pertuybout

Although this house is only assumed to have been owned by a magistrate, it is believed to be a rich property built at the end of the 15th century. The house consists of several buildings arranged around an enclosed courtyard, with a stair turret. The flat-arched main door is framed with rich mouldings and topped by a coat of arms which has since been hammered out. During the Middle Ages, the gate was at the same level as the pavement.

7 The collegiate church of Saint-Cerneuf

The present-day architecture of the collegiate church of Saint-Cerneuf is the result of several building campaigns. It is probable that a church was first built on this site during the pre-Carolingian period. This church, known to have existed in the 10th century, was followed by a rather more elaborate Romanesque church with a crypt, three naves, a transept and a chevet with four radiating chapels. The crypt is thought to be one of the oldest in Auvergne, along with that found in Clermont Cathedral. The ambulatory is also in the Romanesque style. Sometime in the 13th century, the collegiate church of Saint-Cerneuf underwent major building work with the addition of the gothic nave. At that time then, the canonical complex of Saint Cerneuf consisted in a cloister enclosed by the chapter house, the chapel of Saint-Jacques and the canonical residences.

Don't miss the crypt and the Romanesque choir. The 18th century wrought iron railings surrounding the choir: this is the most important set of Romanesque railings in central France decorated with thirteen different motifs. The chapel of the Rosary: mortuary chapel of the Aycelin family decorated with a 14th century mural recognised as one of the most remarkable in Auvergne. The iconographic whole symbolises the passage from earth to heaven: the evangelists can be seen surrounded by angel musicians, the apostles and prophets. The Church fourth wall and the Synagogue (north wall) are personified by a woman.

3 The Eperon fountain (at the crossroads, on the right)

Built alongside the chapel of the former Misericorde convent, the Eperon fountain, the basin of which has unfortunately suffered severe damage, bears the date 1856 in a cartouche. It was built by the sculptor Béraud, based on a project by the architect Taché.

4 Allée des Marronniers (on the left)

The buildings of the former Jesuit College can be seen from this pleasant alley that borders the old city fortifications. After the bridge, turn left and walk along the Quai Porte-Neuve stream. The Angaud river, formerly known as the Riochet, has its source in the Etang des Maures, and flows into the Madet and then into the Allier. This southern quarter of Billoom was the quarter of the tanners, dyers and the windmills. In the gardens on the banks of the Angaud, you can see the pigeon lofts which are so characteristic of the quarter.

8 The Commercial Court (inscription "Palais de Justice")

In 1569, in view of the town's trading activity, the first Commercial Court was created in Billoom at the same time as those in Clermont-Ferrand, Riom, Montferrand and Thiers, and placed under the protection of Catherine de Médicis. During the 19th century, the building facade was modified at the time of the court's transfer to the former chapter house of the collegiate church. The Commercial Court remained in operation up till 1999.

9 Rue de l'Étezon

The house (N° 14): the entrance opens onto an inner courtyard with galleries served by an 18th century baluster staircase.

The belfry: the belfry's bell and clock have rhythmised the town's life since the 16th century. Built on a base of the ancient enclosure, the hexagonal tower is topped by a lantern and a bell tower. At its apex, a wooden Virgin was removed during the French Revolution and replaced with a Phrygian cap and then by a rooster.

Don't miss the house (N88 Rue Notre-Dame): 17th century balustrades ornamented with marcs and grotesques.

These square-shaped "little towers", topped with gnoise caves, house pigeons on the top floor and have small utility rooms on the ground floor. Enter the Saint-Benoît alley.

5 The Jesuit College

At N° 2 Rue du Collège, you can see door jambs crowned with a scallop shell. Continuing along the street, follow a wall delimiting the former Jesuit college. At N° 7, there is a beautiful 18th century door. Enter the Cour de Valmy, then walk across the courtyard to get to the buildings of the old college. The foundation stone was laid in 1559. Walk back across the Cour de Valmy to rejoin the Boulevard Porte-Neuve at the level of the Boulevard Saint-Roch.

BILLOM MERCANTILE

1 Pont Notre-Dame or Pont du Marché

Built in the Middle Ages, the bridge crosses the river Angaud and leads to the town's business quarter. You can see three grain measures dating from the 1800s, lava stone cavities built into the parapet, bearing witness to the closeness of the "bleu market" (wheat).

Don't miss the house known as the "poids de ville" (at N° 7 of the Creux du Marché), dating from the 15th century and built as a corbelled structure over the river.

2 The Creux du Marché or Grain market

Don't miss the fountain (at the corner of the Creux du Marché and the Rue Gravier). The oldest fountain in Billoom stands against a shield framed by laurels. In past times, the water flowed through two sculpted masks.

3 Rue du Colonel Mioche

Formerly known as Rue Mercière or Rue Marchande; this street is lined with half-timbered houses, the ground floors of which contained shops with flat-arched bay windows and stone stalls, opening onto the street.

Don't miss the timber-framed houses (at N° 2 Place du Creux du Marché and Rue du Colonel Mioche and opposite, at N° 8 Rue du Colonel Mioche).

4 Rue du Marché au Chanvre and Place du Marché au Chanvre

Hemp cultivation intensified from the 17th and 18th centuries onwards. The weavers of Billoom used hemp to make sheets, fabrics, as well as cloth and ropes which were then shipped via the river Allier to the Royal Navy's rope factory in Rochefort.

Don't miss the 15th and 16th century house (at N° 1 Place du Marché au Chanvre): on the ground floor, there are the relics of shop openings, as well as a Renaissance-style corner staircase turret.

Don't miss the 18th century house (at N° 3 Place du Marché au Chanvre): the pediment is decorated with a bouquet of flowers in a vase. Oral history indicates that this house was used as a hemp spinning workshop.

5 Place Louis Grimaud or Place du Vieux Marché au Chanvre

The fountain in the centre of the square dates from 1706 and has an octagonal basin where the weavers soaked hemp to manufacture cloth and rope.

6 The Place des Nonnes

The nearby Vistandans convent, founded in the 17th century, gave its name to this square, which housed the pig market during the 19th century. You can still see the old municipal weighing scales, which were used to collect fees and weigh livestock. At the top of the square was the Damatte inn (next to the Capuchin chapel), which no doubt contributed to the lively atmosphere of the marketplace.

Don't miss if you take the narrow Rue Bourrier, you will pass under a timber-framed porch that linked the houses on either side of the street during the Middle Ages.

7 Place de la Halle

Nowadays, the Monday market is just as lively as it was during the Middle Ages, welcoming the region's many farmers.

Don't miss the Halle fountain (089), which was moved to this square after many years at the Place du Chobny. The fountain's architect, Taché, designer of the Hôtel de Ville, also built in 1858, created a large basin which receives water from three superimposed basins decorated with female masks.

3 Saint-Loup Church

The church owes its origins to a Benedictine priory, attached to the Abbey of Sauklanges, and was founded in 995 by Hugues de Mercœur. The canons of Saint-Cerneuf, however, were hostile to this church which was sacked in 1077. The dispute was settled in 1131 with Saint Loup being attributed to the Bishop of Clermont. Building of the present-day church began in 1265 and was completed 150 years later. Today, the building has a complex silhouette, topped by a 19th century bell tower. The church's most remarkable feature is its huge, rib-vaulted porch that both protects and enhances the entrance, which has retained its pedestals and wonderful pointed arch moulding. The painting of the tympanum, unfortunately very damaged, dates from the 19th century restoration campaign. The porch and portal are part of the original construction.

the ruins of a fortified castle that was the seat of one of the four counties of Auvergne. The smaller Turluron houses a chapel, Notre Dame de la Salette, built in 1868 as an ex voto by a family from Billoom seeking to heal their daughter, Marie-Louise Méhodon.

1 Boulevard Saint-Roch (at N° 4)

Turn around and admire the view of the two volcanic mounds known as the Turlurons, characteristic features of the Billoomois landscape, the special nature of which must be stressed. This is a transitional landscape: no longer quite the Limagne plain that stretches to the north, nor the rugged relief of the nearby Livradois mountains. With its small hills, crowned with the ruins of fortified castles, the slopes of which are farmed with a few acres of vines, Billoom's landscape has an air of Tuscany about it. The large Turluron, topped by a wood, contains

2 Domaine de la Recluse (at N° 2 on the Roman road)

During the 17th century, the domain belonged to a canon of Billoom. After the Second World War, it was split up into a main house, a farmhouse and a garden as well as a chapel in the corner of the property (the chapels of La Recluse were a place of refuge for people wishing to hide away from the world). Walk back and take the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Loup. Go around the church of Saint-Loup and take a moment to enjoy the peace and tranquillity of the verdant green landscape.

4 Rue Saint-Loup (au N° 10)

The Porte de l'Hôpital is a monumental gate in andesite stone built in the second half of the 19th century.

5 The Capuchin Convent (at N° 13)

The Place Louis Grimaud is harmoniously arranged around the fountain.

BILLOM SAINTLY