

# Visit to Bricquebec-en-Cotentin



## Welcome to Bricquebec-en-Cotentin!

Nestling in the heart of the Clos du Cotentin, Bricquebec-en-Cotentin is a Petite Cité de Caractère® (awarded the label in 2023) and proud founder of the Pays d'Art et d'Histoire with Saint-Sauveur-le-Vicomte and Valognes. Here, medieval heritage and local life coexist with elegance. Its name, of Scandinavian origin, evokes a "hill beside a stream". A nod to its strategic location between gentle hills and wet valleys, now crossed by the Cotentin greenway. On foot, by bike or even on horseback, visitors will discover a lively town with over 115 shops and craftsmen, a Monday market and a dynamic business park. But above all, Bricquebec invites you to step back in time, from the top of its eleven-sided keep (the only one of its kind in Europe), to the cobbled streets, via the ephemeral stalls and the remains of medieval fairs. This tour is a non-exhaustive list of Bricquebec-en-Cotentin's treasures. ☐ Contact the Pays d'art et d'histoire du Clos du Cotentin (02 33 95 01 26) to find out about upcoming tours and discover Bricquebec-en-Cotentin from an even more historic angle! ☐ To round things off, head to the Maison du Tourisme ou du Patrimoine (Place Sainte-Anne) where the Tourist Office and the Salle du Vert-Lion are located to discover the famous editions of "La Voix du Donjon" by the association Les Amis du Donjon. Ready for your visit? Practical information: The tourist office is on the Place Sainte-Anne. Public toilets are available to the left of the Tourist Office (Maison du Tourisme et du Patrimoine) or on the town hall square.

## Visit

### 1. The Château and its courtyard

#### Bricquebec Castle



A must-see! This stone behemoth has dominated the town for over 900 years. From the vaulted lower hall to the defensive towers, it bears witness to the history of one of the most powerful baronies in the Cotentin region. ☐ Majestically perched on its motte, where several sheep now reign for its upkeep, the castle of

Briquebec-en-Cotentin stands out as the most impressive witness to local history. Built in the 11th century on a strategic hillock, it was the seat of one of the most powerful baronies in the Cotentin region.



The eleven-sided keep, probably rebuilt in the 14th century, still overlooks the town. You enter the enclosure via the entrance porch with its two towers. Initially, this new tower was only two storeys high. Three more storeys were added a little later, in the XV<sup>e</sup> century. This keep served both as a refuge in the event of an attack and as a place to live. It is what is known as a residence tower. It has five levels, each with a very specific function: □ The ground floor (without windows) was used to store food and weapons. □ The first floor, which was reached through an overhead door, was used as a reception room. □ The next two floors were bedrooms. □ The top floor housed the soldiers. At the very top, a protected terrace allowed them to keep an eye on their surroundings and defend themselves if necessary.



The Bertran and then the d'Estouteville families ruled here until the Renaissance. An English period between 1418 and 1450 also marked its history. □ For lovers of medieval architecture, this is a jewel to visit. Guided tours are offered by the Pays d'art et d'histoire (information on 02 33 95 01 26).

## Castle courtyard

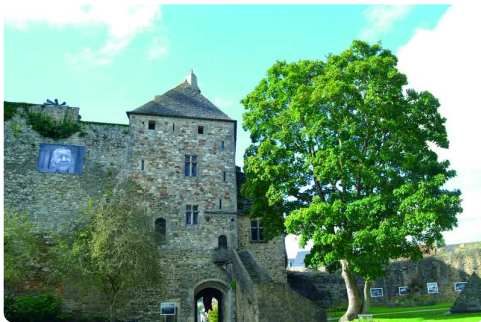


In the courtyard, the lower room or "crypt" features beautiful ribbed vaults. Don't miss the Epine tower and the former aula, now a guest house. The castle complex also includes a fortified enclosure, curtain walls, a chapel that no longer exists, the Chartrier room, the Clock Tower and its museum. □ Further information: exhibitions are held every summer in the Clock Tower and the Chartrier Room in the courtyard of the Château.

## 2. The Museum



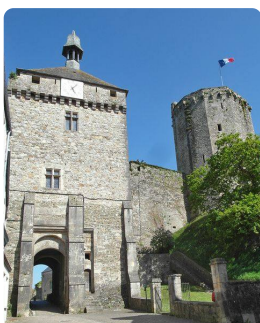
Housed within the walls of Bricquebec's medieval castle, the Tour de l'Horloge museum dates back to the 1950s. It was founded between 1950 and 1954 by André Tardif, then deputy curator of fine arts and curator of the museum, on the basis of a valuable donation: the rich natural history and numismatic collections of Canon Lebreton, parish priest of Bricquebec at the end of the 19th century. This donation, mentioned in several publications as early as 1900, included specimens of mineralogy, palaeontology, zoology and malacology. Initially displayed on the third floor of the Tour de l'Horloge, these collections grew rapidly. In 1953, the museum opened new rooms devoted to local history, featuring lapidary from excavations carried out in the crypt of the old church.



Since its creation, the museum has gone from strength to strength. It has now been awarded the "Musée de France" label, and is currently undergoing a complete inventory and reorganisation of its works. Among the major pieces on display, visitors will be able to admire the bas-relief Six saints and a donor, a remarkable work in polychrome limestone dating from the first half of the 14th century. This bas-relief depicts a procession of six saints, identifiable by their attributes, preceded by a donor kneeling at the feet of the archangel Saint Michael. Listed as a Historic Monument since 1982, this work is thought to have come from the former Romanesque church of Bricquebec, the remains of which can still be seen in the Village.

### 3. The Clock Tower

#### Exhibitions in a historic venue



This medieval belfry once served as a protected entrance to the castle. ☐ Climb to the first floor for a great view of the town! This tower was built in the XV<sup>e</sup> century, probably just after the Hundred Years' War, by the Estouteville family. During the war, this family had distinguished themselves by defending Mont-Saint-Michel against the English. In the past, the entrance to the tower was protected by a drawbridge and machicolations (openings at the top of the walls used to throw missiles at enemies). The clock on the tower, facing the town, gave its name to the building. Like the belfries of northern France and Flanders, this tower is used to mark time. But here, it's not the town that's in control: the clock is more a reminder that it's the lord of the castle who's in charge. So the inhabitants live "on castle time". In the castles of the Middle Ages, this type of tower was often used to collect taxes or fees from the inhabitants of the town.



Since 2019, the town has invited an artist to present his or her work during the summer season, in the first-floor room of the Clock Tower. These exhibitions are open to the public but can be accompanied by a guide. ☐ Find information on our website, our Facebook page Bricquebec-en-Cotentin or our calendar on the ILLIWAP application (Bricquebec-en-Cotentin station).

## 4. The Chartier room

**A showcase of art in the heart of the château**



Set in the enchanting courtyard of the château, La salle du Chartier takes its name from the former seigneurial rooms where charters and precious documents were once kept. Today, it hosts a varied programme of artistic events, open to all, from mid-Spring to Autumn. Exhibitions of paintings, drawings, watercolours and contemporary performances follow one another.





Locals and visitors alike will find it a delightful place to explore, in a setting steeped in history. ▯ Programme of artists on our website or our networks

## 5. The Designers' Workshop

**A showcase for arts and crafts**



A lively and inspiring place where Ms CHOUTEAU, a potter and ceramist, and Mr CADO, a glass spinner, create before your very eyes. Each piece of jewellery is unique! ▯ Ideal for taking home a local souvenir... Workshop at the entrance to Bricquebec Castle, Place Sainte-Anne side. Opening times: - Monday, 9am to 12pm and 2pm to 6pm - Wednesday from 2pm to 6pm - Saturday 10am to 12pm and 2pm to 6pm

**Mr CADO, glass spinner**



**Mrs CHOUTEAU, potter and ceramist**



**The same exhibition space...**



...for two craftsmen



## 6. Place Sainte-Anne and its green corridor



Today, Place Sainte-Anne is a must-see, hosting the weekly market every Monday and the famous Sainte-Anne festival on the last weekend in July. But did you know that it was once part of the seigniorial grounds of the château?

## 7. The Town Hall

The market halls and the former justice centre



Bricquebec's current town hall was built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It stands on the site of the old market halls. In fact, it has retained its appearance: it is a town hall-hall, with arcaded galleries (covered passageways with arches) on the ground floor. One of these galleries is still used today as a fish market. In the Middle Ages, these halls were used for fairs and markets. One part was used by butchers or fishmongers, while the other was used to display a variety of goods.

### A place of justice

The seigniorial court used to be located on the first floor of the former covered market. It was here that the Lord of Bricquebec and his officers administered justice and managed the castle lands. The inhabitants, known as the "bourgeois de Bricquebec et de l'Étang", were obliged to attend. The lord had a right known as high justice, which enabled him to judge all sorts of cases: thefts, disputes, inheritances, crimes, etc. To do this, he was assisted by a number of officers: - judges and sergeants for general matters - a verdier to manage the forests - a provost responsible for collecting taxes, - a sergeant fieffé, who supervised the work of all these officers. Little by little, these men of law and administration became a veritable local bourgeoisie, gaining in power and influence. Many of their families were ennobled before the French Revolution. Just next to the town hall, the building used to be the prison. It was connected by a staircase to the courtroom on the first floor of the old covered market.

## 8. Ephemeral stalls



Behind the town hall, the rue Tristan is lined with these temporary stalls, which are home to craft and artist shops (paintings, sculptures, decorations, jewellery, local produce, etc.) during the summer season. These ephemeral stalls are a real springboard for showcasing the creations of craftspeople. [The exhibition programme can be viewed on our website and our networks.](#)

## 9. Rue de la République

### The Rue de la République and its notable houses



As you stroll along rue de la République, you'll be following the town's old main thoroughfare, lined with merchants' houses and private mansions. Most date from the 18th and 19th centuries, reflecting the urban renewal that took place at the end of the Ancien Régime. At no. 20, you can admire a fine town house, with its facade featuring a forecourt, triangular pediment and stone quoins. Just past the post office, former elements of the Romanesque church (capitals with masks, twelfth-century arcade) were reinstalled on the facade of a building around 1910. It's an unusual way of ensuring that religious heritage survives in the urban fabric! This street reflects the metamorphosis of Bricquebec in the 19th century, between rural tradition and architectural modernity. Today, it is one of the busiest shopping streets in Bricquebec-en-Cotentin. Don't leave without browsing through the shops!

## 10. Typical cobbled roads

### The ruelles and rue Boel Coler



These streets bear witness to the evolution of a fortified medieval village towards a modernised village in the 18th and 19th centuries. Town planning, marked by the burial of rivers, the digging of ditches and the development of mills and fairs, had a direct influence on their layout. Les Ruelles, close to Place Sainte-Anne and Place des Buttes), was historically frequented by merchants, craftsmen and local residents. Rue Boël-Coler, a secondary crossroads, served homes and small trades, bearing witness to the gradual expansion of the town in line with economic and social changes.



This work is part of a wider plan to enhance the town. The shared surfaces in traditional materials (cobblestones, washed concrete), the planted areas and the redevelopment of the car park reflect our ambition.

## 11. The Statue of General Le Marois





The Place Le Marois features a large bronze statue in memory of Jean Léonor François Le Marois, who was born in Bricquebec in 1776. At the age of 26, he became a general under the Empire and aide-de-camp to Napoleon. He was noted for his courage in battle. He later became a deputy for La Manche and a member of the Chamber of Peers. The statue was installed in 1837, one year after his death. It was sculpted by Picchi, cast by Dumoulin, and the base was made by the architect Aillet, a native of Bricquebec-en-Cotentin. □ A local figure worth discovering!

## 12. Square des frères Frémine

### Three artists



At the foot of the curtain walls of the castle is a monument in homage to three emblematic artists from Bricquebec-en-Cotentin: Armand Le Véel (1821-1905), a sculptor best known for the statue of Napoleon on horseback in Cherbourg-en-Cotentin. Charles (1841-1906) and Aristide Frémine (1837-1897), two poet brothers, famous for their poems about Normandy and its people. This monument was created in 1929 by the sculptor Robert-Paul Delandre.

## 13. Notre-Dame church



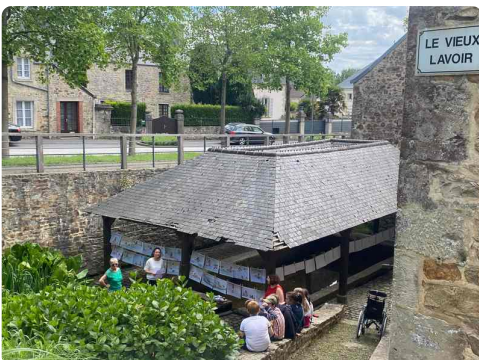
Built to replace the old church in ruins, it is typical of the neo-Gothic style and the result of the persistent work of the parish priest Lebreton. Inside, note the light and the grisaille windows. ☐ Open to visitors. A mosaic slab pays tribute to the builder.



Notre-Dame de Bricquebec church was built at the end of the 19th century to replace the old church, which had become too old and in poor condition. It was designed by departmental architect Émile Pillioud, in the neo-Gothic style that was very fashionable at the time. It is built of cut limestone and comprises a bell tower-porch (bell tower above the entrance) and a chapel behind the choir. The old church was located in the area known as "le village", at the junction of the roads leading to Carentan and Saint-Sauveur-le-Vicomte. Although some Romanesque remains still exist, it was in danger of collapsing. Restoring the old building would have been complicated, and at the time, few people were interested in preserving our heritage. It was therefore decided to build a new church elsewhere, which provoked fierce opposition. The hamlets of Étang-Bertran and Rocheville, which already had their own church, refused to finance the new building. At the same time, they gained their independence and became fully-fledged communes. The project was also contested by part of the town council. Despite this, thanks to the determination of the parish priest, Abbé Lebreton (priest from 1891 to 1906), the project went ahead. He donated the land, paid for some of the work with his own resources, and financed the chapel behind the choir (known as the "Circata chapel"). The foundation stone was laid on 5 June 1898, and the church opened for worship on 29 April 1900. The church follows a classical plan for its time, with a tower at the entrance, a choir surrounded by a passage (ambulatory), and a chapel at the rear. The interior is very bright, thanks to the light-coloured stone used and the simple stained glass windows (known as "grisailles"), which let the light through. As there was no money to build a multi-storey church, the architect added a false gallery at the top to give the impression of a second level. The carvings on the capitals (the decorated parts at the top of the columns) feature plant motifs inspired by the 13th century.

## 14. The old wash-house

### In the heart of the village



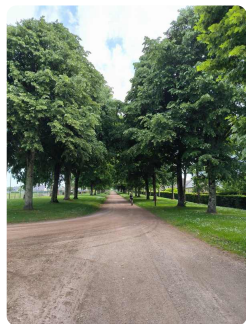
The old wash-house is a haven of peace in the heart of the village. The municipal library regularly runs reading workshops here, where young members can cool off in the shade of the building. There are also libraries in the outlying communes.

## 15. The Place des Buttes



The Place des Buttes probably occupies the site of a former seigniorial park attached to the fortified castle, then to the Château des Galleries. It was used to host the various annual fairs in Bricquebec, the first of which was documented in 1221. Until the end of the 18th century, there were no buildings around the square, with the exception of the canons' dwelling serving the castle chapel. A document from 1787 mentions the construction of six new houses on the square. At the same time, it was referred to as "the new public square". To the north, the Place des Buttes opens onto a promenade formed by an avenue of elm trees planted in the first quarter of the 18th century.

## 16. The Matignons promenade



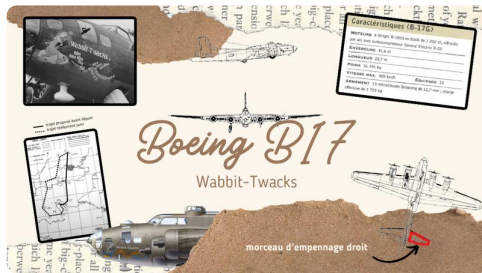
In the 18th century, the wooded area was laid out as a tree-lined avenue, known as the Matignon Promenade, the last lords of Bricquebec. The name is not insignificant: the Matignons were a powerful family linked to the French and Monegasque nobility. The Avenue Matignon, which still links the square to its rural surroundings, perpetuates this memory. The square is a fine example of the conversion of a noble space into a popular social centre. □ A relaxing break is recommended! As you stroll along the square, you'll catch a glimpse of the Espace Matignon, with its stadium, athletics tracks, tennis courts, petanque pitch and other facilities.

## 17. The B17 stele

8 MAY 1944



On 8 May 1944, the 384th Bomber Group was again assigned to attack the Sottevast shipyard. This time, ten B-17 Flying Fortresses from the group's four squadrons took part in the mission. These eighteen four-engined aircraft left Grafton Underwood airstrip between 4pm and 4.14pm and formed up in formation at 9,000 feet (2,740 metres). It was 6.03pm when they passed the English coast over Portland Bill at 21,000 feet (6,400 metres). In order to confuse the Germans as to the real destination of the bombers, the formation passed well off the Channel Islands. In sight of the Côtes d'Armor, it turned around and headed north. The bombers entered over the North Cotentin at Gouvville sur Mer. The photo and visibility on 8 May 1944 were excellent, and everything was in place to ensure success on the target. On board B-17 n° 42-31495, nicknamed Wabbit Twacks, the navigator was Joseph D. Uniszkievicz, and for him too everything seemed to be going smoothly. The target was in sight, the bombers lined up for their bombing pass and closed in on the target. The Wabbit Twacks flies at the tail of the first wave, in a vulnerable position. It carried out its mission and opened its bomb bays.



As they approached the target, the German flak was unleashed and seemed to be more intense and more accurate than on the mission of 27 April. The bomb bay doors of the Wabbit Twacks opened and the formation lined up for the bombing run at 26,000 feet (7,920 metres). With one minute to go, the flak was tracking the formation non-stop, and then suddenly tragedy struck: Wabbit Twacks received a direct hit from an 88 mm round in the rear fuselage. It was 7.01pm and Wabbit Twacks went into an uncontrollable dive, the aircraft in flames. The other crews thought they saw the tail gunner being ejected from the plane without being able to open his parachute, and then the plane crashed to the ground in flames. One man managed to escape, co-pilot Clifford L. Johnson. The B-17 hit a wood in Bricquebec, frightening the local people, who discovered pieces of wreckage from the top of the aircraft and the bodies of six American airmen. The last three bodies were found several hundred metres from the impact. The following men were killed in the crash of the B-17 Wabbit Twacks: Pilot: Lieutenant Cecil F. Johnson Co-pilot: Lieutenant Clifford L. Johnson (sole survivor) Bombardier: Lieutenant Earl H. Crouch Navigator: Joseph D. Uniszkievicz Gunner: Sergeant James Boone Jr. Gunner: Sergeant Thomas Connor Machine Gunner: Sergeant John D. Stevens

## 18. The aisy stream and its old mill





A former seigneurial fishpond, the street runs alongside the Aizy stream and the remains of an old mill. This landscape is a reminder of the ingenuity of medieval water management. ☐ A peaceful atmosphere along the water.

### History panels



The "Yesterday to Today" panels, installed in 2022, trace a piece of history along your route, which you can discover on the spot.

## 19. The pond at the bottom of Cattigny

### A pond



This stretch of water covers more than a hectare and is a place to walk and rest, protected from the road. Stocked regularly, fishing is regulated and managed by the Trout de la Scye fishing club. All anglers must hold a fishing licence. This stretch of water gives an undeniable cachet to the northern entrance to our town (Route de Cherbourg), with a breathtaking view of the Donjon.

## A motorhome park



20-place pay-per-use Camping-car Park with electricity, oil change and lunch break by the pond, 1.5km from the town.

## 20. La Trappe Abbey

**Between prayer and the value of work**



Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Abbey in Briquebec, founded in 1824, is a Trappist community that has managed to combine prayer, agricultural work and crafts (cheeses, charcuterie), overcome the trials of two world wars, be reborn in the XX<sup>e</sup> century, and extend its influence as far as Japan. Today, it still welcomes visitors and guests in keeping with its Benedictine tradition.



The abbey is not open to the public, but there is an illustrated commentary every day at 3.30pm.

## 21. Rue Pierre Marie and the green lane

**Rue Pierre Marie**



On the other side of the ford, rue Pierre Marie, formerly rue de Bailly, retains a distinctly rural feel. It was once an area separated from the rest of the town. The houses at nos. 30 to 34 date from the 16th century: their vaulted passageways, "blue stone" roofs and former use as inns tell the story of another Bricquebec, one of fairs and itinerant merchants. This area, mentioned in the archives of the Pays d'art et d'histoire, is one of the oldest settlements in the commune. It is a reminder that even before centralisation around the castle, Bricquebec was already a mosaic of neighbourhoods.

**The green route passes through here!**



The Greenway crosses this street, making it the perfect place to extend your visit on foot or by bike.

## 22. The remains

**A timeless building**



Despite the destruction suffered by the building, the remains of the parish church of Notre-Dame have preserved sculpted decoration from the second half of the 12th century. The parish church was first mentioned in a charter of donation to the Abbey of Saint-Ouen in Rouen in 1060. The nave of the current building dates from the second quarter of the 12th century. The chevet was rebuilt in the 16th century. The aisles were rebuilt in the 17th or 18th century, incorporating the high windows and removing the direct

lighting from the nave. The complex was first restored in the last quarter of the 19th century, but was abandoned in 1899 when a new parish church was built. The church was almost entirely destroyed in 1905, with the exception of the large arcades in the north wall of the nave and the north-west pier of the transept crossing. On the same date, one of the large arches in the south wall of the nave and a semi-circular bay were reassembled in Place Gosnon-Verger.

