

The abbey church of Notre-Dame-la-Royale

Situated to the south of the exhibition rooms, the abbey church was razed to the ground in the late 18th century. A few vestiges, including a column with a capital and the bases of the pillars, still mark its location. It is located on the upper terrace.

The treasure chamber

The treasure chamber, which is located above the sacristy, is used to store precious objects, mainly in the cupboards built into the thickness of the walls, where the rebates on the doors remain visible to this day. Abbesses, royal families or wealthy donors donated the relics, precious objects and other gifts. The “treasure” itself is well documented in various inventories, most notably one drawn up by the Abbot of Chaalis in 1792. Over time, the Treasure changed and was depleted by wars, looting, and theft. Drawn up in 1792, the last inventory and the minutes of the sale by auction of the furniture in 1793 have allowed us to track the various objects in the treasure until their dispersal. Five objects survived: the Maubuisson chalice (14th century), the Maubuisson ewer in coconut wood and gold-plated silver, the crosier known as the abbey of the Lily with a volute in faceted rock crystal (15th and 14th century) and the Maubuisson crosier (13th and 15th century), all of which are preserved in Versailles’ Lambinet Museum. The Vierge ouvrante de Maubuisson, once displayed in the church of Saint-Ouen-l’Aumône, was stolen in 1973. Today, archaeological and religious objects from the abbey or linked to it are exhibited in the treasure chamber.

The treasure chamber on the first floor of the abbey is accessible by appointment.

The dormitory

With the exception of the treasure chamber and the former bedroom of the abbess, the first floor has completely disappeared. Rebuilt in the 1980s on a completely different model, it now accommodates the administrative departments of Maubuisson abbey, several artists’ studios, a resource centre, business premises, and co-working spaces. In 1951, the chief architect of the Monuments Historiques (French Historical Monuments Authority) ordered that the remaining building, which had been badly damaged by seepage from the upper terrace, should be roofed. A concrete framework was thus erected and the roofing was completed in 1954. In those days, the estate was the property of the Œuvre Israélite des Séjours à la Campagne (Isrealite Fund for Country Holidays), a summer holiday camp presided over by Baroness de Rothschild.

The guest house

Built in 1750 under the abbess Charlotte Colbert de Croissy, the guesthouse – known as Saint-Charles house – was built circa 1750 and represents the last major construction in Maubuisson. Today, in spite of the extension work carried out in the 19th century, it still stands as a former château, and the original structure can still be discerned. It occupies the site of the former converse quarters and medieval kitchens and comprises several levels: the apothecary, the candle shop, the procurator-receiver’s lodgings and the parlours where the nuns used to welcome visitors approved by the abbess from behind gates. This house has been in the Rothschild family’s family since 1928. Today, it is used by the Œuvre Israélite des Séjours à la Campagne (Isrealite Fund for Country Holidays).

Private property

The medieval barn

Built in 1240, the barn is situated on the edge of the Maubuisson estate. Its name, “Grange aux dîmes” (tithe barn), was coined in the 20th century but is actually a misnomer because Cistercians were prohibited from collecting tithes, a tax levied only on parish churches. It is actually the barn of the former farm, which has now disappeared. Originally divided into three naves, the imposing building lost its east aisle during the July Monarchy. The 13th century stone columns, which are surmounted by capitals with drooping waterleaves, support a 13th century oak roof frame, much of which is original. Outside, buttresses reinforce the building. Originally, a monumental porch framed by two pillars on the eastern facade and a pedestrian door in the northern gable (still existing) formed the entrance.

During the Hundred Years’ War, in the second half of the 14th century, a polygonal turret with a spiral staircase was built on the north gable. After the Second World War, the Rothschild Foundation – which has owned the estate since 1928 – built a synagogue in the barn, which remained in use until the 1990s.

Accessible during the European Heritage Days and during historical

AVA VIRTUAL ARCHAEOLOGY ASSISTANT

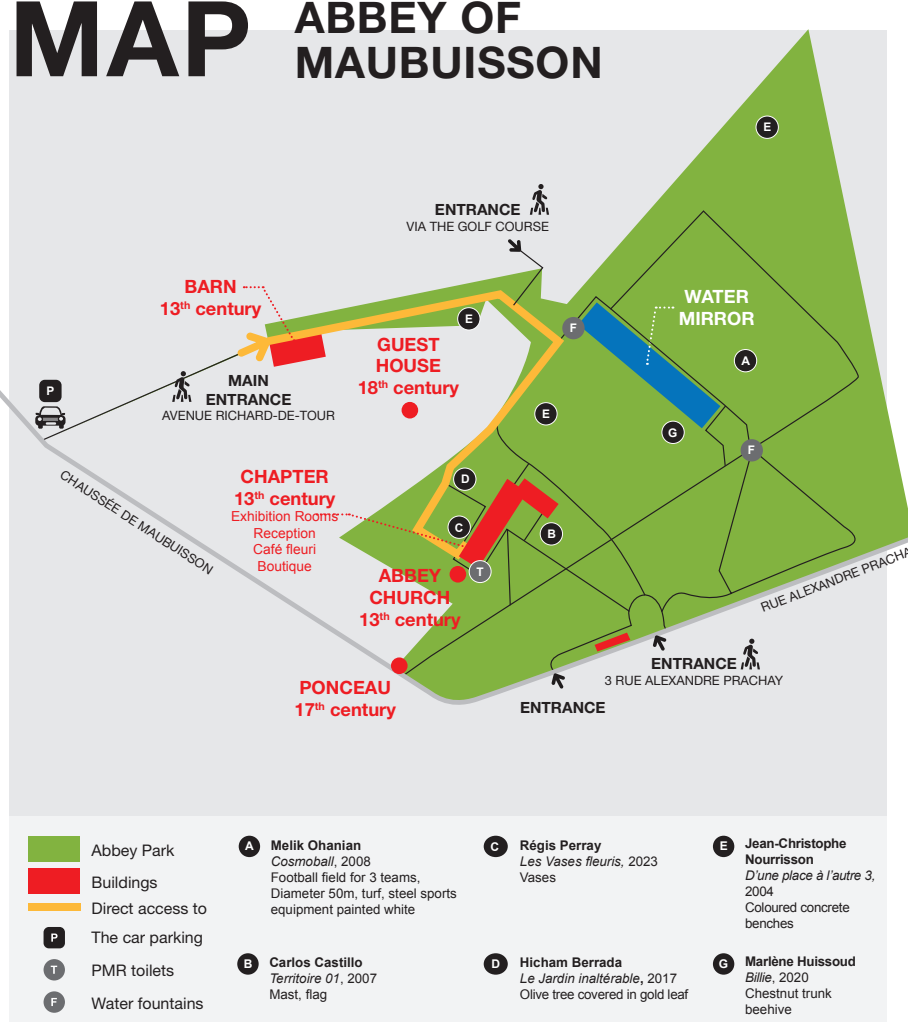
The AVA artificial intelligence application can be accessed via any smartphone. It is designed to offer the general public a genuine archaeological experience filled with surprises. It enables visitors to listen to and imagine everything that is hidden: the history of the abbey, the former buildings that no longer exist...

As you explore the remains of the Maubuisson Abbey, you will meet some fascinating people, famous figures, and the present-day inhabitants of the site. History is a collective adventure; so let's explore the history of the abbey together!

Open to the public / Free access in the park
Duration: 1 h 15 / Free
Bring a smartphone and headphones



MAP ABBEY OF MAUBUISSON



Abbey Park

Buildings

Direct access to

The car parking

PMR toilets

Water fountains

A Melik Ohanian
Cosmoball, 2008
Football field for 3 teams,
Diameter 50m, turf, steel sports
equipment painted white

B Carlos Castillo
Territoire 01, 2007
Mast, flag

C Régis Perray
Les Vases fleuris, 2023
Vases

D Hicham Berrada
Le Jardin inaltérable, 2017
Olive tree covered in gold leaf

E Jean-Christophe Nourrisson
D'une place à l'autre 3,
2004
Coloured concrete
benches

G Marlène Huissoud
Billie, 2020
Chestnut trunk
beehive

Contemporary art venue
of the Conseil départemental du Val d'Oise
avenue Richard de Tour
95310 Saint-Ouen l'Aumône
Tel. + 33 (0)1 34 33 85 00
abbaye.maubuisson@valdoise.fr
www.abbaye-de-maubuisson.fr

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PRÉFET DE LA RÉGION ÎLE-DE-FRANCE
Ligne Paris-Fontainebleau

MAP OF THE HISTORIC ROUTE

ABBAY OF MAUBUISSON

If you would like to find out more about the history of Maubuisson, please browse through our digital label: archive images, engravings, drawings and photographs will complete your knowledge of the abbey.



IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE GLORIOUS HISTORY OF A ROYAL ABBEY

In 1234, the Queen of France, Blanche de Castille, founded the abbey of Notre-Dame-la-Royale near the fiefdom of Maubuisson. Nine years later, she purchased the estate. Blanche was the widow of Louis VIII, who administered the kingdom for more than 10 years while waiting for the majority of their son, Louis IX, known as Saint Louis. Maubuisson is a Cistercian abbey for women built outside Pontoise, a place frequently visited by the royal family. Founded for royal motives, in an era when religion played a pivotal role, the abbey has stood the test of time and has remained at the forefront of “great history”, for better or for worse...

An abbey placed under the protection of the crown

The first nuns moved into Notre-Dame-la-Royale in 1242, after a well-executed construction plan. Set on an estate that abbesses would continuously consolidate over time, the abbey became a spiritual sanctuary for ladies, many of whom were members of the nobility. Until the late 14th century, the abbey also served as a royal residence and a necropolis for the monarchy. When Blanche of Castile died in 1252, a solemn funeral was held in the abbey church, and her body was buried in the nuns’ choir. The Kings of France were regular visitors at Maubuisson, where they often conducted matters of the highest importance: in 1307, Philip the Fair signed the arrest of the Knights Templar; in 1313, he met Edward III, King of England, on the estate. In 1441, Charles VII established his headquarters in Maubuisson before laying siege to the town of Pontoise to oust the English. Such closeness to the King ensured that Maubuisson abbey played a prominent role in the Hundred Years’ War from 1328 and then again during the 16th century Wars of Religion. During these turbulent times, the abbey had to withstand the darkest moments: it did not escape the Great Plague in 1348, the social upheavals that swept the countryside, the devastating wars on its doorstep, or the series of famines in the 16th century. While the abbey was pillaged from time to time, its abbesses were determined to protect the estate during calmer periods.

Prosperous times

In the 17th century, the abbey gardens were renovated and redesigned: large avenues and fountains were created, the stream was transformed into an elegant water mirror, the enclosure walls were reinforced, the farms were refurbished, a new mill was built, etc. Then followed a prosperous era during which the abbey remained a place of refuge for ladies of the court wishing to “retreat”. The abbey also continued to forge close relationships with the higher echelons of the kingdom. While in the early years, the community, under the 1516 Concordat of Bologna, elected the abbess, she was appointed by the King. The latter traditionally chose to appoint the management of the monastery to the daughter or sister of one of his entourage. Famously, the King appointed Angélique d’Estrée, whose sister Gabrielle was a favourite of King Henri IV. During its heyday, at the end of the 17th century, Maubuisson abbey was home to some fifty nuns, twenty or so laywomen and novices and a large number of servants. Some twenty novices were also being educated in the boarding school that opened in the middle of the century.

A new calling

In the 18th century, despite a gradual decline in the number of nuns, the abbesses initiated new construction projects. In 1789, there were only 18 nuns remaining. The French Revolution proved fatal to the institution, with the auctioning off of its movable assets in 1793-1794.

From this point on, the abbey's future became very uncertain. It was used as a military hospital until 1795, as a "quarry" for construction materials, as a farm and eventually as a spinning mill in the 19th century. Since then, three railway lines have surrounded it. In the early 20th century, the surrounding land was parcelled out, thus enclosing the park. Following some restoration work was undertaken at the beginning of the 20th century by the owner, Mme Guérin, the Rothschild Foundation purchased part of the estate in 1926. It was only in the second half of the 20th century that the abbey regained its former glory.

In 1947, the site was listed as a Historic Monument. In 1979, the Département du Val d'Oise began excavations and bought the estate, thus opening the way for a large-scale restoration project. In 2001, Maubuisson abbey became a contemporary art centre and today, it welcomes all types of visitors, as well as artists and entrepreneurs, in the very heart of a sprawling landscaped park.



THE ABBEY BUILDINGS

In the Middle Ages, the monastery was protected by a double enclosure. The area enclosed was 6 hectares.

9 The sacristy

The sacristy is a room where worship objects such as the holy books, liturgical silverware (chalice, ciborium, paten, monstrance) and altar linens are kept. Situated between the chapter house and the church, the sacristy is directly adjacent to the church choir.

8 The chapter house or capitular hall

The chapter house serves as the abbey's decision-making centre. Here, every morning, after the first communal prayers (matins, lauds, and premiums), the choir nuns gather to hear the reading of a chapter from the Rule of St Benedict or the martyrology. The nuns discussed practical issues such as the day-to-day running of the convent and the acquisition and sale of land. They also resolved disciplinary matters and deliberated on the admission of new novices.

The chapter, which opened onto the cloister gallery, allowed the converses and novices to attend the meetings without actually participating in the debates. The doors opening onto the parlour and sacristy are quite recent. Originally, the chapter only had access to the cloister.

CISTERCIAN FOCUS

Cistercian art is based on the rule of Saint Benedict. Cistercian art owes its beauty to the use of the ruler and the square, and to a dispassionate, undisguised clarity. Architecture follows the Cistercian principle of sobriety: no paintings, no sculptures; use of stone, glass, iron and terracotta.

ARCHITECTURAL FOCUS

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE
In terms of architecture, Cistercian abbeys evolved from Romanesque to Gothic in style, but were always very simple in shape and ornamentation. Gothic in style, the abbey boasts ribbed vaults, lancet windows and capitals with plain plant motifs.

7 The parlour

The parlour was the only room in the monastery where nuns were allowed to speak together. The Prioress distributed the day's work and addressed everyday matters without raising her voice, owing to the room's special acoustics. This is where the archives were stored (charters, account registers, receipts and plans, now kept at the Val d'Oise Departmental Archives).

CISTERCIAN FOCUS

Silence is golden in Cistercian abbeys. The rule of Saint Benedict prescribes silence apart from group readings in the refectory and the church, and meetings in the chapter and in the parlour.

ARCHITECTURAL FOCUS

THE STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

The rooms feature monochrome, non-figurative "grisaille" stained glass windows, which were executed by Mireille and Jacques Juteau in Ermont during the eighties. The artists drew their inspiration from fragments uncovered during the archaeological excavations. The capitular hall (chapter house) and parlour boast ornamental borders that form interlacing patterns around simple greenish and neutral glasses, in keeping with the simple aesthetics and sobriety of Cistercian art. The stained-glass windows in the nuns' room are more vibrant with colour ranging from yellow to light brown.

ARCHITECTURAL FOCUS

THE TRI-LOBED LANCEOLATE WINDOWS

The tri-lobed lanceolate windows are also reconstructions. The columns, crocket capitals and three-lobed infill elements found during the archaeological excavations of the cloister in 1979 and the chapter house in 1980 allowed for an accurate restoration.

6 The nuns' hall

The nuns sewed, embroidered, spun wool and made lace for the Church, creating decorative panels as well as altar coverings and tablecloths.

CISTERCIAN FOCUS

The abbey follows the motto "*ora et labora*" (pray and work), which is based on manual labour and hospitality. The nuns take vows of obedience, poverty and chastity. The manual work imposed by the Rule of Saint Benedict is destined to combat idleness, one of the enemies of the soul. However, such work must be relatively uncomplicated, to ensure that it can be carried out whilst praying.

ARCHITECTURAL FOCUS

TILES
Fragments of mortar, as well as various types of paving and brightly coloured yellow and green glazed tiles, were unearthed during archaeological excavations. These findings have helped to faithfully reconstruct the tiling, now visible in the different rooms of the abbey. They are laid in checkerboard, herringbone or interlacing patterns.

3 The latrines

As was common in many monasteries, monumental latrines were built on the canal to drain off wastewater. They were constructed at right angles to the nuns' block and above the canal that closed off the enclosure. There are communal latrines on two floors in this building. On the ground floor, eight toilets were provided, next to the nuns' quarters. On the first floor, two rows of thirty-eight seats were built next to the dormitory. Maubuisson and Royaumont are the only Cistercian abbeys in France where the latrines have survived.

ARCHITECTURAL FOCUS

The latrine building is supported by twenty fourteen-meter-high arches. The glass floor offers a view of the course of the canal, which was used to drain the wastewater from the latrines and kitchens.

REMAINS ALL AROUND...

The park

In 1651, the estate covered 32 hectares of land, woods, meadows, vines, orchards, and vegetable gardens. In 1926, an area of the park situated on the opposite side of the railway line was sold in subdivisions to a group of private owners, many of whom were Parisian construction. Today, the Liesse stream and still runs through the remaining ten hectares.

The ponceau

This covered passage, known as the ponceau, was built by order of Catherine d'Orléans Longueville, Abbess of Maubuisson from 1653 to 1664. It was only covered in 1680 by her successor, Louise Hollandine de Bavière. In 1946, when she used the money intended for its demolition to rebuild it, the Baroness de Rothschild salvaged this piece of architectural heritage from destruction. This passage led the monastery's nuns to the kitchen gardens and orchards of the Clos du Roi, which were separated from the abbey by the old chemin de Méry (rue Alexandre Prachay). This allowed the sisters to easily come and go without being seen by the laypeople using the Route de Méry. Known as the Clos du Roi, after Saint Louis, the gardens were sold during the French Revolution. Houses and villas were built between the rue de Maubuisson and the high end of the rue Maurice Dampierre. The top of the Clos is quarried for the stones that were used to build the abbey.

20 The passage

The passage between the cloister and the garden opens onto the nuns' room to the north and the parlour to the south. The writing on the walls "Bureau central" and "Bibliothèque" probably testify to the occupation of the abbey by soldiers during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870.