



Blois

City of art and history, Blois is guaranteed to surprise you



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Famous characters



Duc de Guise



Henri I^{er} de Guise, known as Scarface, was born on 31st December 1549 and assassinated on 23rd December 1588 in [the Château de Blois](#). First Prince de Joinville, then Duc de Guise (1563) and a Peer of France, he was also Comte d'Eu and Grand Master of France.

He was one of the political beneficiaries of Saint-Barthélemy in 1572, head of the Catholic League (1576) during the Wars of Religion in France. Very popular, he became the Master of Paris after the Day of the Barricades (12th May 1588). He was assassinated on the orders of Henri III during the States-General in Blois.

Catherine de Medici

Catherine de Medici was born on 13th April 1519 in Florence (Italy) and died on 5th January 1589 in Blois (France).

The daughter of Lorenzo II de Medici (1492-1519), Duke of Urbino, and Madeleine de la Tour d'Auvergne (1495-1519), she grew up in Italy, her father's native land.

Through her marriage with the future Henri II, she became Dauphine and Duchesse de Bretagne from 1536 to 1547, then Queen of France from 1547 to 1559. Mother of the kings François II,



Charles IX and Henri III, as well as Queen Elisabeth (queen of Spain) and Marguerite (known as "la reine Margot"), she governed France as queen mother and regent from 1560 to 1564. She often resided in Blois with the court.

Catherine de Medici was an emblematic figure of the 16th century her name inextricably linked to the Wars of Religion. On the side of civil tolerance, many times she tried a policy of reconciliation.

Catherine de Medici was also an outstanding sponsor, who financed many construction projects and protected a number of French artists.

A persistent dark legend depicts her as an austere woman, jealous of power and not averse to committing any crime to maintain her influence. Now, however, there is a trend towards her rehabilitation, even acknowledging her as one of France's greatest queens.

Henri III

Henri III (19th September 1551 in Fontainebleau - 2nd August 1589 in Saint-Cloud) was king of France from 1574 to 1589.

The fourth son of Henri II, King of France, and Catherine de Medici, he was initially given the name Alexandre-Édouard, and the title of Duc d'Angoulême. In 1560, on the accession of his brother Charles IX, he became Duc d'Orléans. When he was confirmed in Toulouse, in 1565, he took his father's name, Henri. On 8th February 1566, he became Duc d'Anjou.

On 11th May 1573, he was anointed King of Poland, reigning over the country from 11th May 1573 to 12th May 1575. On 30th May 1574, his brother Charles IX having died, he left Poland on the quiet to gain the throne of France. He was crowned in Rheims on 13th February 1575 under the name Henri III and married Louise de Lorraine on 15th February.

When he mounted the throne, Henri III inherited a divided kingdom where his authority was only partially recognised. His reign was marked by serious religious, political and economic problems. In 1576 and 1588, he summoned the States-General to Blois twice, and had his rival, the Duc de Guise, assassinated there. Henri III was confronted with political and religious parties backed by foreign powers, which ended up by undermining his authority: the Malcontents party, the Protestants party and finally, the League, which succeeded in having him assassinated. He died in Saint-Cloud on 2nd August 1589, fatally stabbed by the monk Jacques Clément.



François 1er

François 1er (1494-1547) was crowned King of France on 25th January 1515 in Rheims cathedral and reigned until his death in 1547. Son of Charles d'Angoulême and Louise de Savoie, he belonged to the Valois-Angoulême branch.

François 1er is considered as the emblematic monarch of the French Renaissance period. Art and literature flourished in France during his reign. He undertook the construction of the châteaux of Blois and Chambord, then Fontainebleau. From a military and political angle, François 1er's reign included several wars and major diplomatic events.

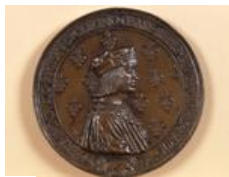
He had a powerful rival, Charles Quint, and had to rely on the diplomatic interests of King Henry VIII of England, always keen to position himself as an ally of one or the other side.

Domestically, his reign coincided with the increasingly fast spread of Reformist ideas. François 1er introduced a series of reforms relating to the administration of power and particularly to improve the tax yield, which were implemented and continued under the reign of his successor Henri II.



Louis XII

Louis XII, born on 27th June 1462 in [the Château de Blois](#), died on 1st January 1515 in Paris, and nicknamed "Father of the people" by the States-General in 1506, was King of France from 1498



to 1515. He married his second wife in 1499, Anne de Bretagne (1477-1514), widow of Charles VIII, daughter of Duc François II de Bretagne and Marguerite de Foix. He often took up residence in the Château de Blois, where he was born and where he built the wing bearing his name.

His reign was marked by the Italian wars, which ended with defeat in Novara in 1513 and, domestically, the justice and tax reforms.

Gaston d'Orléans



Born on 24th April 1608 in Fontainebleau, died on 2nd February 1660 in Blois, he was the third son of Henri IV (1553-1610) and Marie de Medici.

Brother of King Louis XIII, Gaston was named Duc d'Anjou, as the closest heir to the throne, and was also known as Monsieur (a title conferred on the king's brother), then from 1643, the Grand Monsieur, to distinguish him from the Petit Monsieur, his nephew Philippe, Louis XIV's brother.

In 1626 Gaston reluctantly agreed to marry Marie de Bourbon, Duchesse de Montpensier, forced to do so by Richelieu. This brought him sole rights to the duchies of Orléans and Chartres, together with the earldom of Blois. The following year saw the birth of Anne Marie Louise d'Orléans de Montpensier, future Grande Mademoiselle. Back from exile in 1635, Gaston settled in Blois where he began construction of a new [château](#) designed by François Mansart, but only one wing was completed.

Cultivated and refined, but apathetic and fickle, Gaston de France spent his life conspiring, first against his brother and Cardinal Richelieu, then against his sister-in-law Anne of Austria and Cardinal Mazarin. These conspiracies always failed, having no real political plans. Gaston often denounced his accomplices, then saw them perish (e.g. d'Ornano, Chalais, Montmorency and Cinq-Mars).

In 1638, the unexpected birth of a dauphin (the future Louis XIV) meant he was no longer the first heir to the crown. He lost his financial credit and could not carry on with his plans to rebuild the Château de Blois.

When Louis XIII was dying, he appointed Gaston governor and lieutenant-general of Languedoc. On the death of Louis XIII, Gaston de France was appointed lieutenant-general of the kingdom and head of council on the queen's authority, while Louis XIV was still a minor. However, Anne of Austria imposed her will on the Paris Parliament and seized the reins of power.

Gaston took part in the Fronde civil wars and was exiled by Mazarin to his Château de Blois in 1652, where he died in 1660.

Anne de Bretagne

Anne de Bretagne, born on 25th January 1477 in Nantes, died on 9th January 1514 in Blois, was Duchesse de Bretagne.

She was the daughter of François II (1435-1488), sovereign Duc de Bretagne, and his second wife, Marguerite de Foix (1449-1486), Princesse de Navarre. She married her second husband, Louis XII, on 8th January 1499, and she mainly lived in Blois. A daughter of this marriage was Claude de France (1499-1524), Duchesse de Bretagne and Queen of France (1515-1524) through her 1514 marriage with François I^{er}. She was a key element in the power struggles that, after her death, led to the union of Brittany and France.



Claude de France

Born on 13th October 1499 in Romorantin, died on 20th July 1524 in Blois, Claude de France, daughter of King Louis XII and Anne, Duchesse de Bretagne, was Duchesse de Bretagne and the first wife of King François I^{er}. On 8th May 1514 Claude married her cousin, the Comte d'Angoulême, future François I^{er}, bringing him Brittany at least, in the event that Louis XII and the new queen, Mary Tudor, conceived a dauphin.

Living her whole life in the shadow of her husband François I^{er}, to whom she bore seven children, she had to fight her mother-in-law, Louise de Savoie, who had seized power over the affairs of

state. She governed her duchy of Brittany with the same fervour as her mother, Anne de Bretagne. Also Comtesse de Blois, she probably supervised the construction of the François 1^{er} wing.



Denis Papin



Denis Papin (22nd August 1647 - circa 1712) was a French physician, mathematician and inventor, known for his work on steam engines. Born in the little village of Chitenay, near Blois, to a middle class family, Denis Papin studied at a Jesuit school, before going to Angers university, where he gained a degree in medicine, while demonstrating an aptitude for and a pronounced interest in physics. After becoming a doctor in 1669, two years later he was a trustee of Christian Huygens, who then ran the Académie des Sciences in the Louvre. In 1673, he worked with Gottfried Leibniz, the same age as him, who remained his friend and correspondent. Forced to flee to England following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, he designed his "cooking pot" for which he devised a safety valve. He then went to live in Kassel, Germany, where he established the principle of the piston steam engine (1697). He died a pauper's death in England, a forgotten man.

Abbé Grégoire



Henri Grégoire, also known as Abbé Grégoire, born on 4th December 1750 and died on 28th May 1831 in Paris, was a French priest, Catholic ecclesiastic and politician, one of the leading figures of the French Revolution. In 1788, he made his name with a tract entitled "Essai sur la régénération physique, morale et politique des Juifs" (Essay on the physical, moral and political regeneration of Jews), a work that advocated civil and religious tolerance. Elected clergy deputy in the States-General, he was one of the clergy members to take the Jeu de Paume oath, and he then contributed to the lower clergy meeting of the Third Estate.

In 1790, he became President of the Société des Amis des Noirs, and in December he was the first to vote for the civil constitution of the clergy. Elected Convention bishop for the Loir-et-Cher (Blois) in 1791, he sat on the Convention, stubbornly defending tolerance and freedom. Promoting the abolition of the monarchy, he refused to vote for the king's death. Member of the Comité d'Instruction Publique, he played a big role in the committee's creations, such as the Institut national, the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers and the Longitudes Office. He was behind the decree of 28th September 1791 granting rights to Jews and he was also one of the main promoters of the decree to abolish slavery on 4th February 1794.

In 1795 he was elected member of the Conseil des Cinq Cents, where he sat until 1798. In February 1795, he argued successfully for freedom of worship to be proclaimed. In 1798, he left the Conseil des Cinq-Cents and was appointed librarian at the Arsenal. Member of the legislative body in 1800, he was appointed to the Senate in December 1801. As a senator in 1801, he was a member of the opposition: he refused to accept the Concordat and voted against a consulship for life, the establishment of the Empire and the restoration of the nobility. Under the Empire, his History of religious sects in the 18th century was banned. Elected to the Chamber in 1819 by the Isère department, his election was ruled invalid. He died in Paris on 28th May 1831.

Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin, "Houdini"

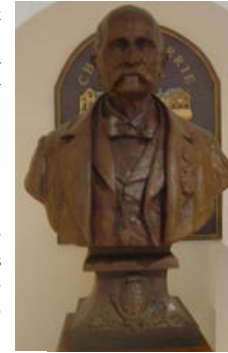
Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin (7th December 1805 in Blois - 13th June 1871 in Saint-Gervais-la-Forêt) was the most famous French illusionist of the 19th century, the "reviver of the magic arts". Considered the greatest illusionist and magician of all time, behind almost every "great trick" in contemporary magic, he was also an avid builder of robots. He died on 13th June 1871 in Saint-Gervais-la-Forêt, near Blois.



Auguste Poulain

Auguste Poulain was born in Bordes farm near Pontlevoy on 11th February 1825. In 1834, at the age of 9, he left the family farm to work for a grocer in Bléré, then in 1837, he was taken on by another grocer in Blois before setting off to Paris to work in a luxury grocer's shop run by Mr Leguerrier who made his own chocolate. In 1847, Auguste Poulain set up in business for himself as a confectioner-chocolatier in Blois, 68 Grande Rue, the same house where the magician Robert Houdini had been born. Helped by his wife, he sold the chocolate that he made himself. In 1848, Auguste Poulain launched his own brand and in 1852, he filed a manufacturing patent.

In 1856, Poulain changed premises, moving to 8 and 10, rue Porte-Chartraine. At 3, Lion Ferré, he set up his workshops. 1862 to 1864 saw the construction of the factory in La Villette, outside the walls of the city, between the recently-opened railway station and the château which was just a barracks at the time. Albert Poulain, his son, joined his father in the business in 1874. He took over the family firm from 1880 to 1893 and helped to expand the factory, buying more ground and building other factories.



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