

PONT AUDEMER VAL DE RISLE TOURIST INFORMATION OFFICE

11 rue Thiers 27500 Pont-Audemer
Tel : 02 32 41 08 21

tourisme-pontaudemer-rislenormande.com

Open Monday to Saturday
all year round

MUST-SEE

- THE WEEKLY MARKETS
Monday and Friday mornings
- THE MASCARET FESTIVAL
First two weeks of July

PLACES TO VISIT

- CANEL MUSEUM
- LA MICROFOLIE (digital museum)
- L'ÉCLAT theatre
- LA PAGE LIBRARY
- THÉROULDE ART GALLERY
- L'ÉCHO (contemporary music)

Plus d'informations sur
tourisme-pontaudemer-rislenormande.com



SELF-GUIDED TOUR

NORMANDIE

PONT-AUDEMER

THIERRY HERMÈS AND LEATHER WORKING



The tanners' alley

Portrait de Thierry Hermès en 1870
Photo : Santiago et Bottier Archives Hermès

[illegible]

Dating back to the 11th century, Saint-Ouen church was enlarged in the 15th and 16th centuries. Its architecture and the richness of its decoration is typical of the flamboyant style but unfortunately the rebuilding project was never finished. Inside can be found a collection of remarkable stained-glass windows, the oldest of which dates back to the 15th century, and a listed pipe organ. Keep an eye out for the shield of the Tanners Corporation which can be found in one of the chapels where their motto "Patentia et labore" can be seen.

This square used to house many tanneries. At the corner of the rue des Déportés is the "petit théâtre" (the small theatre), an old brick and timber building built by René Costil for his workers and their families, which was used as a function room. According to a descendant of the Costil family, Thierry Hermès may have made buckles and straps in his ancestor's factory. This factory, which was partially destroyed by bombs during the Second World War, moved into a modern building to the west of the town to continue its production. Its influence was felt throughout Europe until its closure in 2005.

Pont Audemer is progressively restoring its "venelles", the small and narrow alleyways which, in the past, gave access to the water in the streams. Being near water was essential for the different stages of the skin tanning process and the canals were also used to transport goods. Flat bottomed boats called "échaudes" were used for this purpose. The canals were also used as drains for a large number of latrines, fortunately the town had public water fountains for supplying drinking water!

Before taking the venelle Canet, take a look at the district of Saint-Aignan which stretches out on the opposite bank of the river Risle. It's in this district on rue Brasserie that Thierry Hermès lived with his family. A large spur-maker producing spurs, brides and buckles was also located in this district. It is very likely that Thierry Hermès worked for Mr Eliot the owner of this establishment. Two of Thierry Hermès' children were born in Pont Audemer, Charles Emile in 1831 and Elisabeth Joséphine in 1833.

Until 1975, boats were able to travel up the river Risle from the Seine estuary. All kinds of goods passed through the port such as fish, wheat, oats, linen, rice, different sorts of oils, cotton bales, oysters and shellfish. Large numbers of animal skins were also imported into Pont Audemer. At this time Pont Audemer enjoyed an excellent reputation for the quality of its tanning techniques.

This road used to be called rue aux Juifs (road of the Jews) because of the large Jewish community that lived in Pont Audemer in the 12th and 13th centuries. Set out in a straight line, this road is in marked contrast to the historic heart of the town. Some of the town's public figures lived here, such as the owners of the largest tanneries. At n°15 can be admired the beautiful mansion of Mr Plummer who, like his compatriot Mr Eliot, was from England and for whom Thierry Hermes may also have worked. The different tanneries located in this road all had the same layout. At the front, facing the street, was the owner's home and at the back of the property were the tannery workshops with direct access to the water in the streams.

On this road no attempt was made to align the buildings' façades. Instead you can admire the recesses formed by the traditional half-timbered houses with projecting first floors.

In the past this road was known as Grand Rue (Main Road) and had a covered vegetable market level with the church. Now, the Rue de la République is the ideal place for a bit of shopping or to take a break at one of the town's many bustling pavement cafés and restaurants!

It was probably in this road that the "maison commune" (Communal House), the equivalent of today's Town Hall, was situated. Running parallel to the rue Clemencin, this road also straddles the "ruisseau des Pâtisseries" (the stream of the pastry chefs). From April to September you can see visitors sailing past in *canoë-kayaks*. Why not take a leaf out of their book and *contact* the town's kayak club to organise your own unique visit of the town.

In the past, Place Louis Gillain (Louis Gillain Square) hosted a horse market. It's easy to imagine Thierry Hermès taking a stroll around the market to improve his knowledge of horses. The horse market was just one of many specialised markets held in Pont Audemer. There were also butter, poultry, material and cattle markets. Along with the covered vegetable market there was a covered wheat market on Place Victor Hugo and a covered hide market on today's rue Notre-Dame du Pré.

From the bridge on rue Thiers, first of all, admire the old 'Au Printemps' shop sign and then a little bit further on, on the right you can see a building with small wooden slats arranged horizontally. These adjustable louvers helped regulate the airflow through the building to dry the hides properly. This building is one of the last visible reminders of the great adventure of leather making in Pont Audemer.

We hope that you have enjoyed this visit and we wish you an enjoyable stay in our region!