



MONS



WOMEN

Past and present



A guided tour enriched with digital experiences to help you question the place of women in the city.

Practical Information!



Starting Point

Square Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Mons,
Belgium (50°27'13.9"N 3°56'45.5"E)



Distance & Duration

Around 2h00 for a route of 2,4 km on foot



Material Needed

At least one phone with internet connection for
2 people, headphones, a piece of paper per
participant, felt-tip pens or colored pencils.



Solutions

The solutions are either included in the
digital activity or in the support material



Safety

Always pay attention to the traffic around you,
especially when the sidewalks are narrow



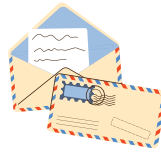
Follow the indications in green all
along the tour to find your way.



You can also scan this QR code
to see the map of the tour, but
only if you really need it!



A Curious Letter



Victoria, a friend of yours, called you earlier today and insisted on meeting in Mons. She sounded incredibly excited on the phone but refused to explain why. When you arrive, she barely says hello and pulls out of her bag a small book with an old envelope.

"Look what I found hidden among old papers, when emptying my grandmother's house!" she says.



Scan the QR code to discover the document found by Victoria.



No signature. No date. No explanation.
Just this letter, a city, and a small book with a map and some notes. You didn't need more...

"Explore the influence of women in shaping this city and discover which place they hold here today... this sounds like a mission for us!" says Victoria.

You glance at the map. The first stop is the Collegiate Church of Saint Waltrude, just a few meters away... Let's go!



Stop 1: The Collegiate Church of Saint Waltrude

The founder of the city is a woman!

You both look at this gigantic church and feel amazed by its architecture.

You start wondering who Saint Waltrude is... but Victoria already has the answer.

"I don't know many women from Mons, but Saint Waltrude is probably the most famous one! She is the reason why we can stand here and explore the city today!"



Mons exists because one woman chose to leave everything behind. We may not know exactly what is true or legendary, but her story still defines Mons today.

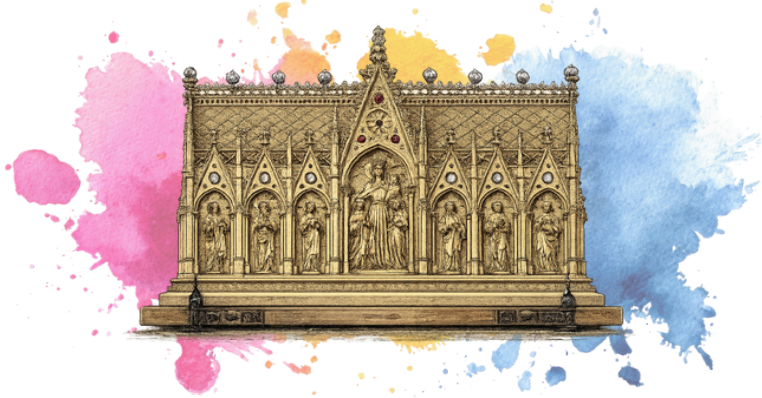
One says that Waltrude lived for around 70 years in the early Middle Ages (7th century). She was from the high nobility and she was also married, with 4 children, but she decided to leave her privileged life and founded a small religious community on this hill, the "mont Castrilocus".

That community grew. A monastery followed.
And slowly, around it, a city took shape.
The city you're standing in right now.



But we don't know in details who Waltrude really was. Most of what survived comes from texts written long after her death: part fact, part legend, impossible to fully separate. Though unlike many saints, she was not depicted as a superwoman. She was mostly remembered for being kind. For caring for the poor. For freeing captives. For being, by all accounts, remarkably... human.

After her death, her relics became a symbol of protection for the people of Mons. Plague, fire, war, injustice: in every crisis, the city turned to her. Five miracles have been attributed to her since her death.



And in 1349, at the height of the Black Death, an exceptional procession was organized on Trinity Sunday to ask for her protection. According to tradition, that procession gave birth to something you might already know: the Ducasse de Mons.

Though she is a religious figure, Waltrude unites believers and non-believers, as well as locals and visitors. Her story isn't really about religion. It's about what gets remembered, what gets lost, and how a single person's choices can quietly shape and even define a place for over a thousand years.

She didn't conquer a city, she didn't rule it, she was not particularly rich and yet everyone knows her here. More than that, if you look closely, you will notice that there are always candles burning for her inside, a sign that she still holds a special place in the heart of the people of Mons.



CHALLENGE

Be the fastest to find 3 words related to Saint Waltrude's story in this puzzle.

You can ask for a hint if you get really stuck.

F	W	Z	R	E	L	I	C	S	H	I
E	E	Q	S	E	V	P	L	S	S	J
G	Ç	R	U	E	M	R	D	C	A	O
C	F	N	B	P	L	O	X	S	M	L
F	T	N	F	J	I	C	C	R	Z	O
W	R	X	W	J	U	E	A	L	V	Ç
D	J	E	G	H	U	S	R	R	Q	Q
L	J	K	D	A	Ç	S	U	L	I	U
B	M	U	G	R	Q	I	T	T	L	M
N	M	P	L	K	Q	O	J	P	L	B
I	X	K	C	P	U	N	V	S	W	I



Go up the "Rampe Sainte Waudru" on the left of the Collegiate Church and stop next to the small park.

Stop 2: Two Communities of Women

Two different destinies in remembrance.

"Wait, look at this part of the letter." said Victoria.

She points at a few lines you hadn't paid attention to, at the bottom of the page:

"I was not alone. We never were. Long before anyone named it, communities of women were already shaping the city and paving the way to women's independence."



"I am wondering which communities she is referring to. I have heard about one of them "the Canonesses" but that's all. Talking about this, do you know this whole area was completely different at their time?"

Scan the QR code to meet two fascinating communities of women from the past.

Explore the content to travel back in time and see Mons as they knew it. When you are ready, take the final quiz before going to the next stop.



Victoria puts the letter away for a second.

"It rocks", she says.

"Women were already organizing themselves here, centuries ago. Beguines, Canonesses... They were super modern for their time! Beyond the buildings they left to the city, they also helped shift the way women were seen. I can't believe I had never even heard of the Beguines before..."

She looks up at you.

"I wonder what feminism looks like today, and how it's actually lived here in Mons. It's probably very different from what the Beguines experienced." She smiles.

"Come on... let's find out."



Take "Rue Samson" on the right side of the park. Go straight and take the third street on your right (rue Notre Dame). Go straight until you can turn left. Then take the first street on your left and stop next to "Picardie Laïque" that is on your left.



OBSERVATION CHALLENGE

On your way, pay attention to the name of the streets. You will encounter the name of another community of women. Which one? If necessary, you can use a translator.

Stop 3: Picardie Laïque

Redefining the link between women and heritage.

Victoria is on her phone, when suddenly, she stops walking.
"Wait, look at this."



Scan the QR code to see the
screen of Victoria's phone.
Have a look at the first tab.



Victoria frowns. "The what?"

She opens a new tab on her phone and types "Matrimoine".

**Now check tab 2 –same QR code– and take some time to
listen to the short podcast** recommended for you.

Victoria with her phone in hand: "Why did nobody tell me about
this before? I will definitely join the event next year! They also
have a Facebook page..."

Her phone lights up. She got a message from a friend who
studies at the Polytechnic Faculty, just around the corner.



Victoria is already
walking in the direction
of the school...



Go up the “Rue de la Grande Triperie” and take the second street on your right (Rue de Houdan). Continue a bit and the Polytechnic School will be on your right.

Stop 4: Women and education

Unequal access to education → unequal participation in society → unequal remembrance.



Scan the QR code to join the quiz organized by the Polytechnic School.



Victoria stares at the timeline for a moment after the game ends. "It's crazy when you think about it. Imagine that in 1945, there was only one woman graduating in this entire school" Education was never just about learning. It was always about something bigger: who gets a seat at the table, who gets to participate, who gets to exist fully in public life. Every date on that timeline was a door that had to be forced open. Some of them, right here, in this very building.



Suddenly, you think back of something you walked past on the way here. A new piece of street art, half-hidden around the corner. You were curious but you didn't have time to stop.

"Shall we check? I think it's from 'L'art habite la ville'. ("Art lives in the city"), the initiative that started in 2015 when Mons was European Capital of Culture. Come!".



OBSERVATION CHALLENGE

Come back on your steps and try to find this. It is your next stop.



Stop 5: Female representations in street art

What kind of image of women is shared through street art in the city?

You found it! Observe this first mural (*Eldorado* By Duek Glez, 2019) inspired by Mexican culture and answer the questions of “Step 1” from the street art challenge below.

Once you are done, walk towards the “Marché aux herbes” square, going up the street that is just behind you.

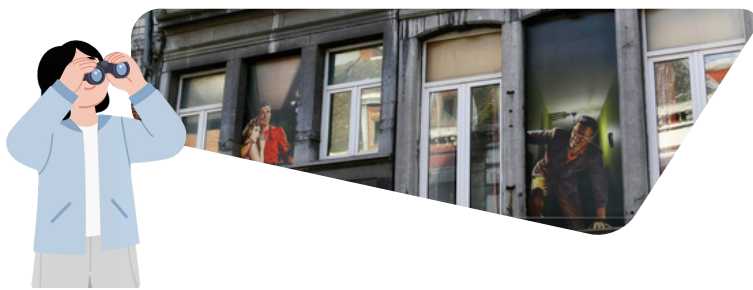
Pay attention to all murals and answer the same questions for each one of them. Then, do steps 2 and 3.



On the “Marché aux herbes” square, you can see the mural “**True Story**” made by Calvin Dussart and Charles Myncke (2015).

It is inspired by the city’s hidden stories:

- The artists were intrigued by the many bricked-up windows in Mons and what they might represent.
- They imagined the life and activity that could have existed behind these walls.
- The mural mixes imagination and memory by including reproductions of 1950s comics and Hollywood film posters.





STREET ART CHALLENGE

Step 1: Observation (in big group)

What do you see in general? What emotions do you see?

What do you think about it?

Here is a visual Power Meter.

Sort the representations of women that you see.

Victim  - Passive  - Neutral  - Active (positive? Negative?)  - Powerful 

Step 2: Reflection (in a big group)

You've seen women erased from history, women fighting for visibility, women reclaiming public space, and now, you are looking at how they are represented in that same public space. What kind of image of women is Mons showing in these streets?

Is it positive to have these representations or not?

What makes a representation of women feel "powerful" to you in public art?

Step 3: Create your mural (in small groups)

If Mons commissioned YOU to paint a mural about women next year, what would it show?

You have 60 seconds to design a concept in small groups and 20 seconds to pitch it.

Victoria is still full of ideas. “We should really share these concepts with the Municipality next time they organise a street art event!”

As she talks, she walks towards the Artefacto Store.



If you are now on the “Marché aux herbes” square, go back on your steps, going down the street for a few meters. You will quickly see the Artefacto store on your right.

Stop 6: The Artefacto Store

A plurality of ways to define who is represented and how

“Wait, look at this!” says Victoria.

A logo on the door indicates that this place is part of an initiative launched in 2023 by the association La Maison Arc-en-Ciel to create safer and more

inclusive spaces for LGBTQIA+ people in the city. You also remember reading that Mons got officially declared “zone of freedom for LGBTQIA+ people” in 2021.



Victoria looks at the sticker, then back at you.

“We’ve been exploring women’s history... but we have never really asked ourselves who was included in this group.

We’ve seen how women had to fight in many areas to be recognized and visible in the city, but what about women from the LGBTQIA+ community? Women of color? Women from lower social classes?”

This sticker makes you reflect...

Cultural heritage isn't only about the past. It is living. Every day, through small choices like this sticker, we shape who feels welcome, who is visible, and whose stories matter.

And do you remember the logo of the "Journées du Matrimoine"? People didn't all agree on it.



Some feminist associations thought it was a problem that there was no man on it. The "shouting" women were also seen as too aggressive and hysterical by some people, when it only represented strength and independence to others...

You look at the door again. Even a tiny logo can spark debate so imagine the whole representation of a community through a city! Cultural heritage is constantly negotiated. Societies decide whose stories are highlighted and how.

Now it is our collective responsibility to make this heritage as inclusive as possible.





Go up the street where you are, until you reach the main square.

Stop 7: The Grand Place

The folklore embodies the tensions between tradition and inclusion

Victoria: "Oh! Last year, I was here, on this square for the Doudou, the battle known as the "Lumeçon". It was incredible! You cannot imagine the energy there was here! This folklore is such a strong part of local identity! You have to see it to understand what I am talking about... Wait, I will show you a video!



Scan the QR code to see the video Victoria wants to show you. Each time it stops, tap the marker to learn more about the role and place of women in the local folklore.





OBSERVATION CHALLENGE

There are two artistic references to the Doudou around this square. Find them and count how many different types of characters from the local folklore are represented (without counting the hands).

Write your answer below. Be careful, one of these artistic pieces is big but well hidden. Good luck!

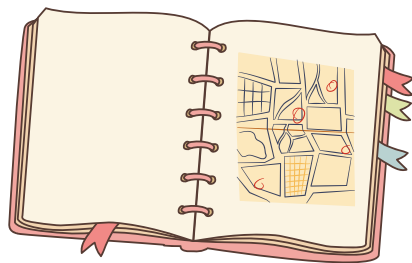
Victoria: "It's true that I have never thought of these tensions between folklore traditions and inclusion.

The other day, I read a quote from the director of the Mask Museum in Binche: **'Traditions that do not evolve die.'**

I believe she was right.

Victoria points at the map in her little book.

"Look, the next stop is not far from here."



Take the street on the left of the tourist office (Visit Mons). Take the first street on your left (rue Cronque) and stop when you reach the end of it.

Stop 8: Marguerite Bervoets Street

Historical figures and street names

Victoria: "Marguerite? A street named after a woman? That is not so often... In Mons, I know that there are a bit more than 10 out of 435 streets named after a woman... She must have been important, even though I imagine many people walk here and don't even notice it or give it a second thought.



Scan the QR code to discover the story of Marguerite Bervoets, but be ready to face a challenging question:
"What would you have done in her shoes?"



Take the Marguerite Bervoets Street on your right and turn right in the "Passage Victor Hugo", in between two buildings.

When you reach the end of the passage, turn right. On your left, you will see a big door (number 20). Take this little path and stop near the bas-relief depicting the founders of Mons literature.



Stop 9: “La Chappelle du condamné” and witches

Uncovering the forgotten women erased by fear, prejudice, and accusation.

Victoria shows you the little book:

“Look, this place is called “La Chappelle du condamné” (The condemned man's chapel). What a strange name for such a cute little building!

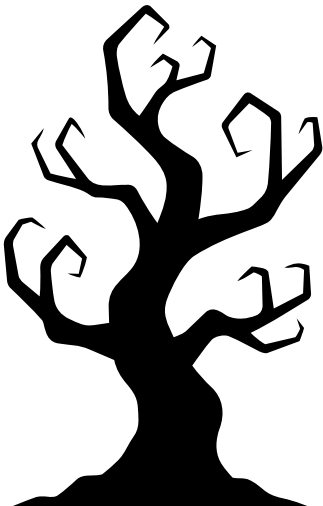
She finds a QR code on the wall under the title “Discover the Story of Marguerite Tiste”.



Scan the QR code to discover what links Marguerite Tiste to this Chapel. We advise you to use your headphones. While listening you can slowly walk towards the Grand Place.



To reach the Grand Place: follow the path that goes slightly to the right and take the passage under the Town Hall.



Victoria stands still for a moment. She stares at the square.

"I will never see this square the same way anymore...

We have been walking through this city, following women who were hidden, forgotten, written out of the story.

And then we find out that centuries ago, some women WERE put in the spotlight ... but as monsters. As something the city needed to get rid of.

We went from burning women, to erasing them, to finally trying to give them back their place. That's the whole arc. That's what this letter was all about.

But here is what I keep coming back to: throughout all these centuries of being silenced, some women found a way through. A way to exist, to speak, to leave a mark..."

Suddenly, Victoria seems to have a flash of inspiration.

"Art, of course! When you can't speak, you paint.

When they won't listen, you create something they can't ignore! Don't you think?"



When you have the Town Hall behind you, turn left and follow the "rue de Nimy". Stop in front of the art school called ARTS², the fusion of the Royal Conservatory of Mons and the Higher School of Plastic, Visual and Spatial Arts



Stop 10: ARTS², Cécile Douard

When a female artist manages to shine a light on forgotten women



You are now standing in front of ARTS², the art school of Mons. Today, women make up the majority of arts students here. But step back 150 years, and the picture looks completely different.

Until the late 19th century, women were simply not allowed to enter art schools. Some managed to learn painting anyway; through a father, a brother, a husband who had the brushes and the space. But even then, the rules were strict for women: no painting nudes, which meant no official commissions, no career, no recognition.

Then came Cécile Douard, who didn't play by the rules and defeated the system... twice.



Born in France in 1866, she couldn't enroll at the Mons Academy because she was a woman.

So she found another way in: private lessons with its own director, Antoine Bourlard. She was so skilled that in 1885, she won the first prize at the Academy as a free student. Her first snub to the system!

She painted traditional portraits, but what made her work truly radical was her focus on the Borinage. The same mining region that inspired Van Gogh. The difference? He painted the men. She turned her brush toward the forgotten: the women buried under the weight of coal dust and silence, and made them impossible to ignore.

But didn't I tell you she defeated the system twice? When Cécile was 33, the river La Trouille flooded. Rushing to save her paintings, she slipped, hit her head and lost her sight. Most people would have stopped there. She didn't. She picked up the violin. Then sculpture. Then... Braille. After the First World War, she became a key figure in the development of the Braille League.

She lost her eyes. She never lost her voice and creativity.



Curious to **discover one of the main paintings of Cécile Douard "through the eyes of a blind person"**? Then scan the QR code, grab some pencils, a piece of paper and try to depict what you imagine when hearing the description.



Continue straight on "Rue de Nimy" until you see the Mundaneum on your right.

Stop 11: The Mundaneum

An institution reinterpreting its heritage to celebrate women's roles

Victoria stops. She pulls out the small book, flips through it... then looks up. "This is it. The Mundaneum. Our last stop."

The Mundaneum

Founded by Paul Otlet, the visionary behind the universal classification system still used in libraries today, and Henri La Fontaine, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1913.

Some people call it the paper internet.

Long before Google, screens and Wi-Fi, people here tried to collect all the world's knowledge.

Millions of index cards. Written by hand. Sorted.

Classified. Stored in endless drawers. All of this for one main ideal: peace through shared knowledge.

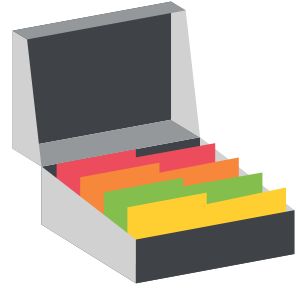
Victoria reads the sign out loud. She stops, then flips through the small book again.

"Wait... it says three people built this place in the book, not two..."



And that's right...

The third person was **Léonie La Fontaine**, Henri's sister. She played a major role, contributing to the writing of the first 400,000 index cards using her own archives, and connecting the project to international networks to actively spread knowledge.



And she didn't stop there... Léonie became one of Belgium's first feminists. She worked with most of the pioneer women from this movement, co-founded the first feminist association in Belgium called "La Ligue Belge du Droit des Femmes", and later created the "Parti des Femmes Belges" to fight for social and political rights, including universal suffrage.

Quite a list... right?

And yet, for decades, Léonie was largely invisible here.

Why? According to the museum spokesperson, a kind of "Otletmania" for the first father of the internet, combined with a fascination for Henri's Nobel Prize overshadowed her contributions.



But things are now changing.

The turning point for the Mundaneum was in 2020, when “women” became the official theme of the European Heritage Days. This gave the Mundaneum the chance to rediscover Léonie’s story and place her at the heart of an exhibition.

All her life, Léonie was driven by a clear goal: to document women’s history and turn it into a tool for education and emancipation. Yet sources on the first feminists in Belgium remain scarce and without traces, history cannot exist. What isn’t documented fades away. And what fades away is forgotten... unless we deliberately choose to preserve it.

In 2026, the archive center organized a Wikipedia workshop to make women’s biographies more complete and more visible, an essential work when knowing that only 1 in 5 Wikipedia articles is about a woman. A street name, a statue, an exhibition... they wouldn’t exist without information. And this recognition shapes collective memory. Because heritage truly lives when it is shared, and it grows each time a new voice carries it forward.



Final reflections

Victoria closes the small book and looks at the letter again.
"I think... this was never only about Mons. It was about learning to notice the stories hidden in any city.

We met women who founded communities, preserved legacies, fought to study, to work, to be heard. Some became symbols. Others almost disappeared. And now I keep wondering how many stories we still walk past every day without seeing them."

She glances toward the Mundaneum.

"Maybe that's why places like this one exist, to keep searching, to keep adding missing pieces.

The main floor is free... I might go in and look around."

Victoria folds the letter carefully and looks at it one last time.

"I think the woman who wrote this was right. Cities don't change on their own. It's up to us to look at them differently, to notice who is present, who is missing, and whose stories still need space.

Cultural heritage isn't just something we inherit, it's a story we keep writing. And our collective task is to make sure every voice, every hand that shaped it, can be heard and remembered.





This booklet was created by ELAN as part of the project Empower Youth Explore Stories (EYES).

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