

A famous French person – Victor Hugo

- Victor-Marie Hugo was born in 1802 in Besançon in France. He was a poet, playwright and novelist. His work often portrayed the lives of poor people and the unjust society in which they lived.
- His most famous works are **Les Misérables**, which the stage musical and film were based on, and **Notre-Dame de Paris**, which includes a character called Quasimodo, better known as the Hunchback of Notre Dame. Many versions have been made including the famous Disney film.
- In **Les Misérables**, a key character is a girl called Cosette and a very famous drawing of the character was used on the book cover and as the logo for the stage musical version.
- In **Notre-Dame de Paris**, Quasimodo is a poor man whose job is as a bell ringer in the famous cathedral in Paris, where he lives in one of the bell-towers. He falls in love with a beautiful gypsy girl called Esmeralda.
- At the time that he wrote this story, the cathedral was in very bad repair and needed lots of renovation work. When the book was published, people became interested in the cathedral and then insisted that the building work should take place. So in other words Victor Hugo's book saved the Cathedral of Notre Dame from becoming completely derelict!
- He married Adele Foucher who he had known since childhood. His family suffered a terrible tragedy: just after his 19 year old daughter, Léopoldine, got married, she and her husband died when their boat capsized on the River Seine. Victor wrote some poems in his daughter's memory.
- For political reasons, Victor Hugo was obliged to live in exile (forced to live abroad). His exile period lasted for twenty years, living in Belgium in 1851, Jersey from 1852 to 1855 and Guernsey from 1855 until 1870.
- Victor Hugo died in 1885, aged 82. He had requested a simple funeral in the style of one of the poor people who he had written so many stories about. However, it was decided, contrary to his wishes, that he would be given a state funeral, which meant that people didn't go to work. His coffin was placed beneath the Arc de Triomphe so that people could easily pay their respects. On the day, it was attended by around two million people as he had become so popular because of his beliefs about people's rights and society. His tomb is in Le Panthéon, a building in Paris which has the tombs of many famous French people.

Interesting fact

- When the cathedral caught fire in April 2019, people remembered a quote from 'Les Misérables' which made them optimistic for the cathedral's future: 'Même la nuit la plus sombre prendra fin et le soleil se lèvera.' ('Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise.').
- Victor Hugo believed that Europe should be united and become a European Union. He planted a symbolic oak tree on Bastille Day (the French National Holiday on 14th July) in the year 1870. He declared that in the future, by the time the tree is mature, there would be a 'United States of Europe.' He called the tree 'the oak of the United States of Europe'. It is still growing and can be found in the garden of the house where he lived in Guernsey: Hauteville House.