

Topic Page: [Lille](#)

Definition: **Lille** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

(Flemish, Lisle) City in NW France, near the Belgian border; capital of Nord department. It flourished in the 16th century under the Dukes of Burgundy. In the late 17th century, Lille became capital of French Flanders; the building of a stock exchange established its commercial reputation. It is a major industrial, commercial and cultural city. Industries: textiles, engineering, chemicals, brewing. Pop. (2000) 991,000.

Summary Article: **Lille**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Industrial city and administrative centre of the Nord*département* in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of France, on the River Deûle; population (2005 est) 224,900. The world's first entirely automatic underground train system was opened here in 1982. The Eurostar train stops here, at the new Eurolille station. Lille is a leading textile centre, known for its lisle (a smooth cotton thread); other industries include metallurgy, chemicals, engineering, and distilling.

History Originally a village on an island, Lille was fortified in the 11th century. During the Middle Ages it was capital of Flanders. With nearby Douai, it passed to the counts of Flanders in the 14th century, then to Burgundy, Austria, and Spain. Louis XIV claimed Lille in 1667 during the War of Devolution, and the town was retained by France the following year by the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle. It was captured by the Duke of Marlborough following a siege in 1708 during the War of the Spanish Succession, but was ceded to France by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. The city underwent a further siege in 1792 during the Revolutionary Wars.

Lille gained its economic strength during the mid-19th century, when the extensive coalmining region of northern France fuelled the industrial revolution. At the beginning of World War I, in September 1914, the French declared Lille an open city in order to protect its industry, which was vital to the economy of northern France. For the same reason the Allies refrained from bombarding it throughout the war. However, when the Germans retreated in October 1918 they did considerable damage to its industrial and transport infrastructure.

During World War II, the city was occupied again by the Germans (1940–44), and was heavily damaged by Allied air raids. After World War II the economy went into decline due the exhaustion of economically recoverable coal, but from the 1980s the city experienced a revival as new industries were attracted to its prime position as a European railway centre; this asset was further enhanced after 1994 with the completion of the Channel Tunnel.

Features Churches include the Gothic church of St Maurice, and the 16th-century church of Ste Catherine. The 17th-century old exchange building is in the Flemish style. The recently renovated Palais des Beaux-Arts has one of the best collections of paintings, sculptures, and decorative arts outside Paris. There is an enormous 17th-century fortress built by the French military engineer Sébastien le Prestre Vauban, and a Pasteur Institute. A bronze statue of Napoleon is cast from guns captured at Austerlitz, where he defeated the Austrians and Russians in 1805. Lille is the seat of a bishopric and has several universities and a Catholic seminary.

Economy Lille is the centre of a great industrial and commercial urban district, which includes Roubaix, Tourcoing, La Madeleine, and a ring of suburban communities. It is a major road and rail junction, and holds an important annual international trade fair in June.

Famous people Lille was the birthplace of the soldier and colonial administrator Louis Faidherbe (b. 1818); the composer Edouard Lalo (b. 1823); and Charles de Gaulle (b. 1890), president of France 1958–69.

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