



The Collégiale Church of Saint-Pierre of Aire-sur-la-Lys

century, the gothic structure of the cross-arches was retained and only the painted decoration has the baroque character of public buildings in the North of France.

Hardly anything survives of the earlier fittings, because of the destruction of 1710, the Revolution, and 1944.

One can only note :

- the organ the case of which came from the Abbey of Clairmarais. It dates from 1633, was restored and played again on 12. October, 1986.
- the statue of Notre Dame Panetiere (lit. bread store) at the northern angle of the transept which dates from 1510. It was restored in 1948 after its destruction in the raid of 1944.
- the statue of the Virgin, of Flemish manufacture which dates from the end of the fifteenth century. It comes from the same workshop in Aire as Notre Dame Panetiere. It was restored in 1963 by Leon Lamotte and is to be seen in the Chapel of Saint-Sacrement.
- the throne and rood screen were made by Boileau between 1842 and 1845. The rood screen was classified as a monument in 1977 as representative of its period.

Monsignor Scott who was the doyen of the Church of Saint-Pierre from 1829 to 1887 had his church painted and decorated under the supervision of the architect, Magnard, between 1832 and 1868. The present defective state of the paintwork does not give a true picture of what it looked like. Only the frescos of the choir were restored in the 1960s.

Of the sixteenth-century paintings, only the fresco of Saint-Jacques (14 m x 11 m) has survived, to be seen in the sacristy. The society for the protection of historic monuments began a complete restoration of this magnificent work in 1995. It dates from the end of the century and draws attention to the cult of Saint John in Aire.

A copy of the *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* after Caravaggio by J. Duponchel (Rome, 1630) is in the Chapel of the Grand Calvary. It came from the Chapel of Devotees and was acquired by the town of Aire, restored by the Historic Monuments and displayed since 2008.

Finally, note the tomb stones reassembled at the bottom end of the church in the two lateral naves.

The Collegial Church of Saint-Pierre was classified as a Historic Monument in 1862.



Parish church of the town of Aire since 1802, the collegial church was originally the church of the Chapter of Saint-Pierre of Aire. A chapter of canons had been established in 1059 by the Count of Flanders, Baudouin V, and Pope Calixte II confirmed the foundation by papal bull in 1119.

The present church (on the site of a Roman church) was consecrated in 1166 by the Bishop of Therouanne, Milon I. It fell into disrepair towards the end of the fifteenth century. Nothing remains of it except several re-used stones and the foundations of the pillars of the apse which one can see in the choir of the modern church under glass plates in the floor.

The construction of the collegial church continued throughout the sixteenth century. One can identify the exact dates which marked the progress of the work from the sculpted stone, better inside than out.

Finished in 1624, the tower collapsed soon after, so that the church was not finally completed until 1634. However, the canons had been able to celebrate the offices in the unfinished building for a century before.

The collegial church suffered terribly during the wars. It was ruined in the siege of 1710 and again as the result of a bombing raid on 8. August, 1943. Each reconstruction was careful to follow the original design.

The dimensions of the building are considerable :

- exterior length overall : 105 m
- exterior width overall : 40 m
- width of the central nave : 10 m
- height of the great arches : 20 m
- height of the lateral arches : 10 m
- height of the tower : 65 m.

The church of Saint-Pierre is one of the most important monuments in the Flamboyant style of the Renaissance in the Southern Lowlands.

The design of the whole is compact. The western tower gains strength and solidity at its base by the extension of the side aisles and the adjoining chapels. The transept does not extend beyond the chapels. Inside, the lower levels remain in an archaic gothic style, but, by way of contrast, the upper levels of the nave and the choir, excluding the transept, were rebuilt in the 1730s in a classical style. It was the same for the high arches. In the mid-eighteenth