

The interior of the church.

The inside dimensions are the following :

Total length: 34.12 metres

Height of the nave (below the vault): 12.96 metres

Length of the transepts: 21.10 metres

Width of the nave: 8.04 metres

All the dimensions of the building are calculated with reference to the <divine proportion>, whether it is a matter of the main measurements or those of the rectangles formed by the elevation of the walls above or below the dripstone or frieze that you can see running below the windows. The first dimension from which the whole construction of the building was calculated seems to have been the bell tower, the only remains of the previous building. Sire Jehan de Valon, represented on one of the first keys, was probably the <Companion> carpenter who, helped by nine monks who lived in the Priory, sculpted and positioned these 45 keys. Note moreover that we know nothing of this carpenter-architect and that it is a very unusual thing that we find his coat of arms so frequently around the church.

A word on the orientation of the edifice : the chevet faces not due East, but NorthEast. The compass shows 113° instead of 90°.

You have to be present on 9 October, St Denis' day, to verify that the first ray of sunlight passing over the horizon filters in through the overhead central window to light up the church. The nave is formed of three bays separated by piers formed uniquely by the meeting in a half-circle of the ribs (or veins) which underpin the vault. They go down, without meeting the slightest obstacle, as far as their prism-shaped bases, after which, at about a metre from the ground, there is an octagonal plinth.



The hanging keys



This building with its elegant and sober proportions includes a single nave and a simple transept.



A frieze depicting a vinestock loaded with bunches of ripe grapes, held up at each end in the mouth of a small animal, goes all the way round the building. The vault spreads out above the worshippers a dense network of sculpted ribs or veins. At each intersection, there is a hanging sculpted keystone (projecting down from 0,90 to 1,35 m), painted on its surface, finishing in a tailpiece pendentive (*cul de lampe* in French.) We can still see 44 of these.

The 13 keys of the choir, executed by a better chisel than the others, are from the mid-16th century. These hanging keys represent among other things the mysteries of the Holy Trinity, of the Incarnation and the Redemption. Their mouldings carry the 12 coats of arms of the house of Crequi and the house of Blanchefort.

Information

If you would like to speak to the priest, you can see him either after church on Sunday or at the Presbytery at 4, Montée de l'Eglise or you can telephone him on 03 22 90 00 72

The church is open to the public every day in July and August from 15 to 17h30 and during the National Heritage days in September. For other days, you can get information by phone:

at the presbytery on 03 22 90 00 72.

Bibliography : *L'Eglise Saint Denis de Poix de Picardie* by Rose-Marie Denier (JMJ Editions)

Sites : www.ville-poix-de-picardie.fr / <http://>

POIX DE PICARDIE

A N G L A I S



16th.century: Church of St. Denis
The church with 44 hanging keystones. Unique in France.

Friends, visitors,

Welcome to our beautiful church of Saint Denis, whose history you will enjoy discovering as you read this leaflet ... and thank you for the few moments you will be happy to spend with us, as well as for your prayer united to ours.

The parish church of Poix de Picardie is situated on a hill called the <Montcille>. This name seems to derive from the fact that it was the site of a temple dedicated to Mercury. Access is by a ramp and steps leading up to the entrance of the former castle.

The chapel of this castle became the church of the priory of Saint Denis, which was founded by Gauthier Thyrel III in 1118.





The small city of Poix was to suffer from the military reverses of its lords. In 1346, three days before the battle of Crécy, Edward III of England burnt the town and the church. In 1358, the Jacques (name given to peasants in revolt) occupied part of the castle and set it on fire. The town and the church were rebuilt and later burnt again in 1472 by Charles the Bold...

The present church was reconstructed in the <baillie> - that is, among the outbuildings - of the castle of the Princes of Poix. It was built in accordance with the plans of Jehan Vailon, <Compagnon> or journeyman carpenter, at the request of Jean VIII of Créquy, and was embellished by Cardinal Antoine of Créquy, Cardinal of France, religious counsellor of the King and bishop of Amiens.

Only the base of the 12th-century bell tower and the section of wall acting as a buttress, which is next to it, appear to have survived from the original building.

Started in 1538, the choir and the transept of the new building were finished in 1540. You should admire the fine vault, remarkably light and extremely robust, with 44 keys (or bosses), sculpted and painted as they jut out (or rather clown) for over more than a metre. The 13 keys of the choir are from the middle of the 16th century. All the ribs (or veins) of the apse lead to main keystones representing the Incarnation, the Redemption and the Holy Trinity. They are surrounded with a string of witnesses and writers : the 4 evangelists, the saints Peter, Paul and Andrew, and two different representations of the Archangel Michael.



Their sculpted mouldings carry the 12 coats of arms of the House of Créquy and the House of Blanchefort.

In 1698 a storm tore off the bell-tower door, and then there was a flood in 1702 after a storm, and again a fire in 1707. On 14th September of that year the church was closed to the public.

During the Reign of Terror (a period of 15 months during the French Revolution that was dominated especially by the tyranny of Robespierre), the church was transformed into a warehouse and then into an ox stable. On 7th Thermidor of Year 10 (the revolutionaries scrapped the traditional month names and re-started the calendar from Year 1) the church was given back to the Catholics, who dedicated it to the Holy Virgin.

Bombarded in 1940, its restoration was only finished in 1956 (the choir) and 1962 (the nave.) The original stained-glass windows have disappeared. The openings in the choir were embellished in November 1965 with modern stained glass. The city of Poix had two other places of worship : St Martin, situated at the entry to the Route des Forges, and Our Lady's church, in *Place Notre Dame*. These two buildings were destroyed during the French Revolution, which helps to explain why, while Saint Denis is the patron saint of the town, the patroness of the parish is Our Lady of the Assumption.



A frieze depicting a section of vine trellis goes round the building. In a deep groove, at approximately a third of the height of the walls, under the windows, a magnificent sculpture of a rope of foliage and bunches of grapes comes out of the mouth of one animal to enter, at the opposite extremity, the mouth of another. It should be noted that Poix was once wine-producing and that the grape featured systematically on the works of the craftsmen of the district.

St Denis, patron saint of the parish, has his day on 9th October, and traditionally churches are decorated with ornaments of nature to show the season at the time of the consecration: a patron saint whose day is in the spring will make flowers blossom, the summer will feature a wheat sheaf, autumn will be ornamented with fruits of the harvest. And what symbol in a church is richer than that of the grape : <Fruit of the vine, gift of God and of the work of men>, that grape from which is made the wine which becomes the blood of Christ!

Other Curiosities : In the transepts, you can see Renaissance-style <piscines>, containers with plugholes to allow the washing of the priest's hands and of the communion vessels. On the north, there is one with the Virgin as in the stalls of Amiens Cathedral. On the south, one with the Archangel Michael.

The statue of Saint Barbe, given by the butchers of Poix, is from the 16th century. Its finery and its elegant positioning are remarkable. The style of the tower which it leans against announces the beginning of the Renaissance period and style.