

two half churches
joined together

The Saint Walburga church dominates the town with its majestic tower. This collegiate church consists of two half churches joined together. The joint is between the choir and the transept, the choir almost being a hall church all by itself.

The building history records that the church was rebuilt in 1150 after the fire of 1126. This new church had a big choir without an apse and a crossing tower. The present choir in blue stone from Tournai is a remnant of this Early Gothic monument. The apse was added in 1406, in honour of duke John the Fearless, who was staying in Oudenaarde at the time. In 1414 it was decided to rebuild the church, but these ambitious plans were only half realized because of financial problems and the work was stopped in 1534. Only in 1620 the stately Gothic tower was crowned with a baroque steeple designed by Simon de Pape. After a stroke of lightning the spire burnt down in 1804. Stone from Tournai was mainly used for the older part of the building and stone from Balegem for the Late Gothic part.



Nothing has been left of the medieval furniture as everything was destroyed during the religious riots of 1566 and later. The present furnishings and decorations are mostly in baroque and late baroque style. The church has a rich collection of sculptures, wooden and stone polychromatic statuettes, historic tapestries and paintings. The 14 chapels in the church contain art treasures and a variety of wooden and marble altars, overwhelmingly or subtly sculpted.



tapestry weaving was Oudenaarde's most important industry

The chapels are dedicated to a particular saint, often the patron saint of a guild. Thus the carpenters (Saint Joseph), the rope-makers (Saint Mary Magdalene) and the masons (Saint John the Baptist) all have their own chapel.

There is still a chapel with an altar in the northern aisle of the church dedicated to Saint Barbara, the patron saint of the tapestry weavers.

For three centuries tapestry weaving was Oudenaarde's most important industry and the Saint Walburga church played an important part in the life of the weavers as it was the centre of their religious life.



Around 1100, the lord of Pamele founded the small medieval town of Pamele on the right bank of the Scheldt. In 1543, however, it was absorbed by its big neighbour, Oudenaarde, but just four centuries of autonomy have left remarkable traces, the most beautiful remnant being the church of Our Lady of Pamele.

a luxurious concept

The whole church is in stone from Tournai and clearly indicates a luxurious concept.

The church of Our Lady of Pamele features two important structural characteristics. First there is a double lengthwise gallery or passage built in the thick walls. Originally it was possible to walk all around the building in each of these passages. This system of double passageways is one of the main characteristics of the Scheldt-Gothic style and the Northern French Gothic style in general.

The first church of Pamele was replaced by the present one in the 13th century, the latter having a great cultural-historical value in more than one respect. Because of the relatively short building period (1234-1265) the building is also stylistically a beautiful example of the Scheldt-Gothic style, which can be seen evolving from section to section.

It is remarkable that a building inscription has been preserved here, which is rather rare in our region. The tablet is now hidden under a bronze copy and states the year 1234 and the name of master Arnulf of Binche, at the same time dating the choir of the church. The transept was built in a later phase and the lower church completed the building process.



The second important characteristic is the Gothic system of verticality. Nevertheless, the lines of force in the church of Pamele remain emphatically horizontal. This was typical of the traditional Scheldt architecture in the Romanesque period.



a massive forest of beams

The church has completely preserved its authentic truss from the 13th century: a uniquely stupendous construction, a massive forest of beams. The stained glass windows are undoubtedly spectacularly beautiful. Most of them were made only in the 1930s by, among others, A. Ladon. Every single one of them is a masterpiece conveying the true spirit of the 13th-century Gothic style.

Opening hours: **Saint-Walburga Church**

-April + May + October:

Tu. And Sat. from 14h30 to 17h00 | Thu. From 10h00 to 11h00 and from 14h30 to 17h00

-June + July + August + September: Tu., Wed., Fri. and Sat. from 14h30 to 17h00

Thu. From 10h00 to 12h00 and from 14h30 to 17h00 | Sun. from 14h30 to 17h30

Our Lady of Pamele

From June to Aug.: Sat. & Sun. from 14h00 to 17h30

More info: www.dekenaat-oudenaarde.be/



The two tombs at the back of the aisles are among the most impressive features of the interior of the church. Both are monuments of the barons of Pamele.

A third remarkable entity in the church consists of the choir and its furnishings, conceived by August Van Assche, the architect responsible for the restoration. The high altar has a retable in gilded sandstone featuring statuettes of the apostles. On top of the finely chiselled tabernacle stands an impressive ciborium, which has the form of a spire.



For touristic excursions:

Tourist office

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