The church of Saint-Martin
Pissy-Pôville

Saint-Martin Church, South wall. © Département de la Seine-Maritime

On the plain between the Cailly and Austreberthe valleys lies the *commune* of Pissy-Pôville, created by merging two hamlets by decree on 22nd May 1822. Pissy and Pôville were gifted to Fécamp Abbey by Duke Richard II in 1006 and incorporated into the barony of Saint-Gervais. According to archive sources, each parish once had its own church but Pôville's church of Saint-Pierre-et-Saint-Paul was destroyed during the hurricane of 1818.

Saint-Martin Church in Pissy was extensively modified in the 16th and 17th centuries but still bears older vestiges. The church has an extended floor plan and a flat, buttressed chevet. An octagonal bell tower surmounts the façade, which is entered by an arched door. The bays have moulded basket-handle arches. The façade is built of flint and stone with bricks used as a decorative motif. A sacristy was built onto the south wall of the building in 1947.

The sacristy's interior was most likely modified during the redesign of the choir due to the liturgical reform of Vatican II. The choir stalls were moved back into the choir and turned towards the nave, and the side altars were removed.

Interior of the building from the east entrance, glass plate by Robert Eude, n.d. ADSM 11 Fi 1611. © Département de la Seine-Maritime

The furnishings are matching, with significant elements including the pulpit and the beautifully crafted high altar dating from the 18th century. The ensemble is completed by a baptismal font, pews, confessional and wrought iron rood beam from the early 19th century.


General view of the high altar. © Département de la Seine-Maritime

The high altar, backing onto the chevet, comprises a tomb altar, surrounded by moulded panelling with gold detailing. The altarpiece contains a bay window, now featuring a stained glass window by Devisme installed around 1964-65 (most of the stained glass windows in the building were blown out by a V1 bomb during the Second World War).

The ensemble is surmounted by a glory and two medallions, each containing a painted canvas representing the Virgin on one side and Christ in bonds on the other. The parish registers (ADSM G 8457) show that Noël Jouvenet, a painter and sculptor by trade, worked on the church for 39 pounds in 1618, but the work he carried out is not mentioned. A certain Sieur Jouvenet, of the same family (a son or a brother?), made a step for the high altar 30 years later.

The Jouvenet family was a dynasty of renowned artists in Rouen, both sculptors and painters, working on large-scale projects for Rouen's churches. The painted glory and medallions are typical of artworks adorning other major buildings.
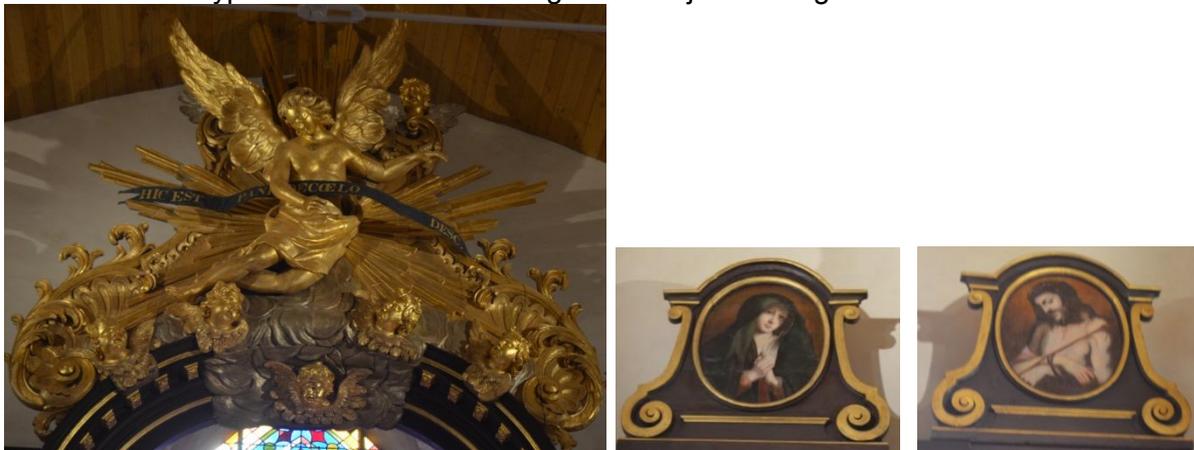
Detail of the glory and painted medallions. © Département de la Seine-Maritime

The commune carried out a major restoration project between 2015 and 2019, giving the building a facelift inside and out.

In the cemetery, two commemorative monuments stand out.
The monument to the dead of the two world wars comprises of a large column topped by a cockerel, a common patriotic symbol in France. The archives are not very informative about the commissioning of this monument. The cockerel, however, is a serially produced piece featured in a catalogue of a foundry company, possibly that of Chapsal frères.

General view. © Département de la Seine-Maritime

Further on, there's a tomb to commemorate the British workers killed in a landslide during the construction of the SNCF tunnel on the Rouen - Le Havre line in 1845. Traditionally, dead workers' bodies could not be repatriated and had to be buried locally. Therefore the mayor decided to lease a cemetery plot in perpetuity to the British authorities.
This event highlights that a railway tunnel was built in the commune in the 19th century, linking the Cailly valley to that of the Austreberthe between the hamlets of Frévaux and Marivaux. Furthermore, this tunnel provides the backdrop for Emile Zola's novel *La bête humaine*.

Commemorative monument, with its inscription in French and English. © Département de Seine-Maritime