



## The History of St. Peter's Church.

Already in very early times Oirschot was a spiritual centre in the diocese of Liege with a chapter, a college of 11 canons. Originally the chapter was housed in the Virgin Mary Church at the Vrijthof, but no extension appeared possible there. That's why in 1268 the chapter founded St. Peter's Church at the present place. Until 1648 this minster was chief parish of the surrounding churches.

### Construction and style.

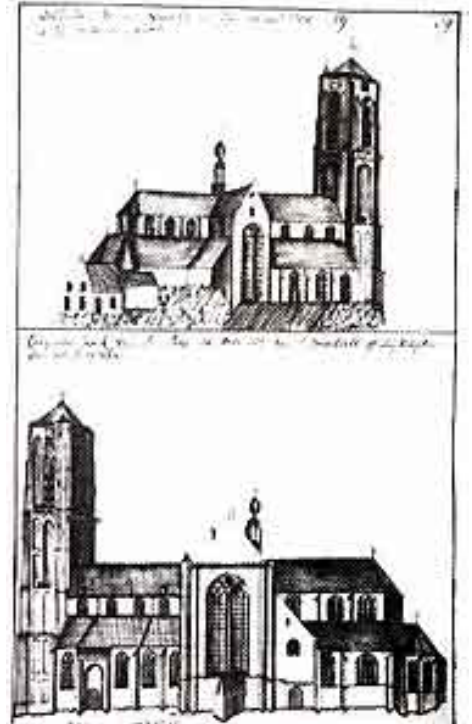
In 1462 the first St. Peter's Church from 1268 burnt down and its precious inventory, inclusive of all important protocols, was lost. Immediately afterwards they started building a new minster around the old foundations. Construction was stopped regularly for lack of money, so that the church wasn't completed until about 1515. The building was constructed from brick with kerbstones and blocks of tuff; this style is called Kempen Gothic style. Classical gothic features are the high pointed arches, the colonnades and the division with a three-aisled nave, a transept, a westtower, a choir with a gallery and three little chapels. The sacristy and the chapterroom were built at the corners of the transept and the sanctuary, and on top of them the Latin School. In those days the interior was rich in appearance by numerous paintings and stained glass windows. Much of the wood-carving was painted. The church had twenty altars. In the years 1508-1511 the famous choir-stalls for the canons were made.

### Disasters.

Disasters and wars caused a lot of damage. In 1566 a great fire broke out in Oirschot, during which the houses facing the church with their backs and a few small breweries burnt down. King Philip II decided that these houses were not to be rebuilt because of fire-risk for the church. In 1623 the remaining houses round the church burnt down and this land was also expropriated. So the present Market and its free location date from these days. The tower was regularly struck by storm and lightning. Originally it had a 30 metres spire, but after the thunderclap in 1627 a small spire was mounted.

### Reformation

In 1648 the church passed into the hands of the Reformists. For reasons of austerity the altars, paintings and stained glass windows had to disappear. From 1672 onwards the Catholics were allowed to attend a barn church at the end of the Nieuwstraat. In 1799 the Catholics got back the church, empty and neglected; the tower however remained in the hands of the council. At once the church was decorated with a precious interior and was restored in 1887.





### From 1900 onwards

In 1904 the southwestern side of the tower collapsed over its full length because of longterm neglect. The council then returned the tower to the parish, which, through savings banks, collected money for the restoration.

On 2 October 1944 during the liberation of Oirschot, the church was set fire to by the allied forces, on account of which the roof and the tower collapsed, and the greater part of the interior, among which the choir-stalls, burnt down. In the years 1945-1952 the church was rebuilt and the baptismal chapel was extended. The temporary spire on the tower was restored in 1960-1962 to the condition it was in between 1627 and 1904. Since 1966 the building has been on the list of the National Trust.



### The Rectory in the Nieuwstraat

The present rectory and the patoral centre are housed in two historic buildings in the Nieuwstraat in Oirschot. These adjacent houses are on the list of the National Trust and were built in 1750 and 1854 respectively. Behind these buildings we find a beautiful park garden, only accessible to the public during carillon concerts. On those occasions the garden serves as a listening place.

#### History

Until the middle of the 18th century the rectory was established in various houses, among others in the Molenstraat. In 1763 Dean Petrus van Helmont built a new rectory at Nieuwstraat 39-41. This house was situated quite close to the barn church which served as parish church from 1677 till 1800. Around 1800 the Catholics could reappear from their clandestine churches and it was lawful again to be a Catholic. In 1853 the Episcopal hierarchy was restored and everywhere parishes with rectories started functioning again. In that very year the church council traded the rectory for the house belonging to Mr. de Jong, notary public at Nieuwstraat 17a. This house from about 1750, with its characteristic hipped roof, was closer to the church for Father De Bont. Almost immediately afterwards the Tilburg architect Van Tulder designed a manor-house and in 1854 this was built against the old rectory (Nieuwstraat 17).



Because of this extension there were more rooms for the priest, chaplains, housekeeper and household staff. In addition a coach-house for the priest's coach was built.



### **Life at the rectory**

Around 1952 the reverend Father De Vries was dean in Oirschot. He lived in the rectory together with two chaplains. The priest determined the rules of the house. Priest, chaplains and two housemaids (the 'priest's maid') each had their own living-rooms and their own bedrooms. Besides there often were one or two intern young girls, who assisted in the household to learn the trade. Half of the present choirhall served as a joint living-room for the gentlemen and could be enlarged by means of a folding wall for great assemblies like meetings of the deanship and festive dinners with many courses, selected wines, and cigars and French brandy to top it all. The cellar under the rectory has been especially adapted to store good wine and make it even better. Priest and chaplains had their own store of wine and also their own supply of coal in the cellar to heat the stoves.



### **Pastoral centre**

When in 1981 chaplain Van Schijndel became priest in Spoorдонк and there were no more intern chaplains anymore, the manor-house at number 17 became a pastoral centre and the house at number 17a became a rectory. In the pastoral centre lots of parish activities take place every day. Among others the parish secretariate, the choirhall, the library and meeting- and workrooms are housed here.