

Village churches

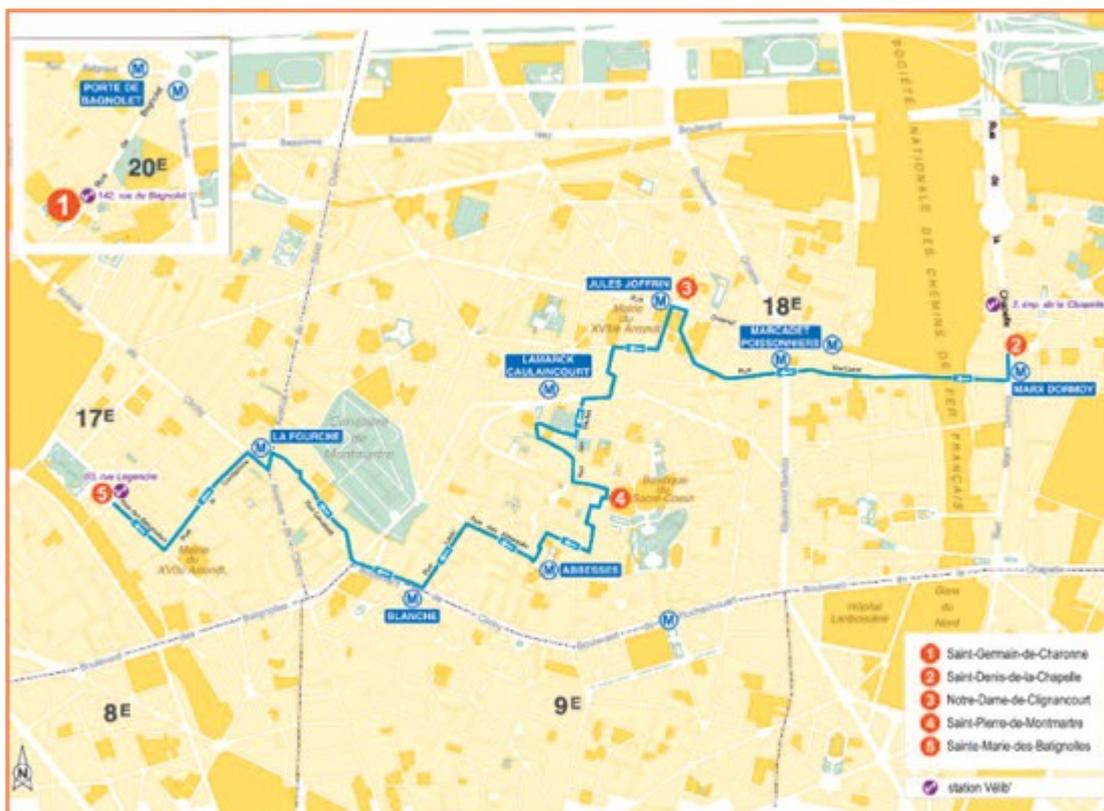
FROM PLACE SAINT-BLAISE (20TH) TO LES BATIGNOLLES (17TH)

The borders of Paris were once different from the ones we know today. From the end of the 18th century, the Wall of the Ferme Générale formed a border around the city, beyond which a number of villages sprang up. In 1840, a fortification was erected on their territory, concentric to the Wall of the Ferme Générale: the Thiers Wall. This was the first sign that the area between these two rings would one day be attached to the capital. On 1 January 1860, the capital also absorbed the villages that surrounded it, in part or in full. These old rural communes have since formed more or less vast urban units, making up the peripheral arrondissements of Paris.

The territories that were annexed in this way may all be different, but they have all retained certain characteristics of their village past. The churches were key elements in their landscape and, most of the time, were the oldest constructions in the towns. Sometimes areas even sprang up around them, as with Saint-Germain-de-Charonne, or were named after them, as with La Chapelle Saint-Denis. The more recently built churches emerged as important infrastructures which drew many worshippers and structured the landscape, like Notre-Dame de Clignancourt and Sainte-Marie des Batignolles.

Often modest in appearance, the “village churches”, unlike the ones in the centre of Paris, benefited from plenty of space all around them and imposed a strong presence upon the territory. They therefore constituted important historical and urban reference points.

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1 (20th) 4, place Saint Blaise Saint-Germain-de-Charonne

Until it was annexed by the City of Paris under the Second Empire, the village of Charonne, far from the noise and crowds of the capital, was a countryside town which Jean-Jacques Rousseau described in *Les rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (Reveries of a Solitary Walker).

Saint-Germain-de-Charonne stands at the heart of the old village. Legend has it that an oratory was built to commemorate the time that Saint Germain, the Bishop of Auxerre (the town he was named after), passed

through the locality. On the former site of the oratory stands the current church, which combines a few relics from the 12th century (main pillars of the tower) with architecture from the 15th-17th centuries. This is the result of a series of modifications, mainly carried out for the purposes of worship or to remove the traces of the fires that broke out there on various occasions.

This church was the starting point for the urbanisation of the village. Standing slightly above the rest of the village on the slope of a hill, at the top of a flight of thirty-one steps, the building was a real attraction thanks to its function as the village's panoramic viewpoint. Rue Saint-Blaise opposite was the main road. Even today, walkers who travel up this "grand'rue" ("high street") have the distinct impression of being in a small village, imbued with a sense of nostalgic charm by the neighbouring tall towers that loom ominously over it.

Saint-Germain-de-Charonne is the only church in Paris, apart from Saint-Pierre-de-Montmartre, to have retained its small parish cemetery. This type of necropolis was prohibited in Paris for hygiene reasons, by a prefectural decree dated 2 Ventôse (the sixth month of the Republican calendar), year IX. Its presence helps enhance the picturesque character of the site. In spite of the many transformations it has undergone during the centuries, and despite the increasing urbanisation of the sector, because of its status as a protected Historic Monument the building has retained something of its past as a village church that once stood among the vines.



(18th) 54, rue de Torcy

Saint-Denis-de-la-Chapelle

While Saint-Denis-de-La-Chapelle Church often goes unnoticed today because of its position within a very dense urban fabric, it nonetheless has a very rich history that goes back a long way. The origins of the village of La Chapelle lie in the old Roman road which started at Lutecia and led to the northern provinces via the Pas de La Chapelle, a natural pass between the Montmartre hill and the heights of Belleville.

It then became the Saint-Denis road. At an unspecified time, an oratory was erected along this road to commemorate the place that, legend has it, Sainte-Geneviève visited on her way to pray at the tomb of Saint-Denis. Later, the small oratory was replaced by a chapel. The building was then successively named Sainte-Geneviève and Saint-Denis, as it stood at the centre of the estate that Saint-Denis Abbey owned in this region. These two names were also given to the settlement that formed around the modest building, proving how important the presence of the church was to the development of the village. A feature of the site was its location along the road travelled by the cortege of the kings of France, who made their solemn entry into the capital through the Porte Saint-Denis. Its inhabitants also saw their funeral corteges pass by on the way to bury their remains at Saint-Denis Abbey. Even today, Rue de La Chapelle is one of the major roads to the north of Paris. Circa 1204, the modest chapel was replaced by a church, a few relics of which remain today. It was often damaged, but was restored almost completely circa 1670 and 1856, hence its eclectic appearance. A basilica dedicated to Joan of Arc, to commemorate the saint's passing through this locality, was built on its north façade. This building, thus enclosed within its narrow confines, became an annex of the new church.



(18th) 2, place Jules Joffrin

Notre-Dame-de-Clignancourt

Notre-Dame-de-Clignancourt Church is an interesting example of the religious buildings built by the communes on the outskirts of Paris before their annexation. The expansion of La Chapelle from 2,000 to 11,000 inhabitants between 1830 and

1860, due to the industrialisation of Northern Paris, justified the building of a church of vast proportions. To this end, the commune called upon the services of

Paul-Eugène Lequeux (1806-1873), an architect who was in charge of redeveloping the arrondissement of Saint-Denis at the time. In order to meet the requirements of the time, he strove to give the building simple and rational shapes. Unlike the monumental buildings in the centre of Paris, which did not have sufficient space around them, Notre-Dame-de-Clignancourt fulfilled its functions perfectly, that is, structuring space and marking it with a strong presence. In fact, it is interesting to note that in 1892, in order to provide a centre for the new 18th arrondissement, the authorities decided to reproduce the village structure with Place Jules Joffrin.

The new town hall was therefore placed opposite the church. The square thus presents the image of a city centre, effectively providing a sense of centrality, although this position is topographically challenged by the steep slope of the hill.



(18th) 2, rue du Mont Cenis

Saint-Pierre-de-Montmartre

The origins and development of Saint-Pierre-de-Montmartre are attached to the legend of Saint Denis. The evangelist saint of the 3rd century is thought to have been martyred on the Montmartre hill, which subsequently became a sacred place for Christians. In Merovingian times, a chapel surrounded by a necropolis stood at the site of the current church, and a small hamlet developed around it. In the 12th century, the site began to develop once more. In fact, in 1133 it was given to King Louis VI and Queen Adelaide of Savoy, along with the chapel of the holy martyr. They founded a royal monastery for Benedictine nuns at this location. This building would stand on the site until the Revolution. The monastic buildings, gardens and vineyards were spread across 13 hectares around the church. The eastern part of the abbey church, reserved for the sisters of the abbey, was devoted to the Virgin and Saint-Denis. The last three spans of the nave, dedicated to Saint Pierre, were used for the parish service, in order to meet the religious needs of the lay people who lived in the area or who moved there to meet the needs of the new abbey.

The discovery of a crypt under the chapel of the holy martyr in 1611, located on the southern slope of the hill, drew a great many pilgrims. A priory, called the “abbaye d’en bas” (meaning “lower abbey”) due to its geographical location, was erected around this chapel. The “abbaye d’en bas” gradually replaced the old abbey, which was thought to be too outdated. In 1686, the nuns left it permanently to settle in the priory. The buildings of the old abbey were demolished, except for the church, which was given over to parish services.

The nuns also gave a plot of land in the north to the inhabitants of Montmartre, for use as a parish cemetery. This devolution to parish worship spared Saint-Pierre church during the troubles of the revolutionary period, when even the priory was totally destroyed. In 1794, it was converted into the Temple of Reason, a tower on which Chappe installed his first aerial telegraph. Then, despite its advanced state of dilapidation, the church was restored between 1899 and 1905 by the architect Louis Sauvageot, who tried to restore it to its former state. The hill, dominated by its church and public square (Place du Tertre), retained its village feel for a long time. While the fame of the village has been exploited, resulting in a host of shops that have falsified and completely altered it, the church has kept its picturesque side with its spacious perspective.



(17th) Place du docteur Félix Lobligeois

Sainte-Marie-des-Batignolles

Until the turn of the 19th century, the territory of Les Batignolles was a virtually uncultivated piece of countryside, occupied by a few scattered houses and isolated farms. The future Parisian district began to develop in the First Empire, driven by entrepreneurs who bought land at low prices and sold it on. In order to encourage property speculation and cater to the people who moved there, urban infrastructures were developed: a town hall, theatre, church and so on.

A church was built in 1824 on what had become the central square of the new village. Its creation was the result of a private initiative. The edifice, built by Auguste

Molinos from 1826 to 1829, was in fact paid for by a subscription fund. Nonetheless, the money collected was only enough to build a single nave, despite the generosity of the Duchess of Angoulême.

As the population grew, the church, which by now had become the parish church of the commune of Batignolles-Monceau, was enlarged by Paul Eugène Lequeux between 1839 and 1851. Sainte-Marie-des-Batignolles was built in the style of the Roman basilicas. Its forms are reminiscent of those of the great Parisian buildings, albeit on a smaller scale. Thus, the plan is a variant of the ones used by Godde, at around the same time, for Notre-Dame-de-Bonne-Nouvelle and Saint-Denis-du-Saint-Sacrement: a nave lined with columns, side aisles without chapels, a non-projecting transept and a choir in the form of a hemicycle. Therefore this is a simple and rather economical version of the basilica churches found in the centre of Paris, which are a monumental version of this church. The building created here, devoid of pretention and full of well-balanced, harmonious lines, owes most of its charm to its location. The small square it stands in the middle of has not been spoilt by the construction of disproportionately large buildings, as is the case with its contemporary, Notre-Dame-de-Bercy. Therefore it is still possible to feel the village atmosphere of Les Batignolles in this square.

Saint-Germain de
Charonne

Saint-Denis de la
Chapelle

Notre-Dame de
Clignancourt

Sainte-Marie des
Batignolles



Due to the provisions of the Concordat signed in 1801 between France and the Holy See, which ratified the Revolutionary seizures of the clergy's possessions and transferred the property of the parish churches and their offices to the communes, the City of Paris currently owns around one hundred religious buildings, including a large number of Catholic churches.

The Concordat regime, which remained in force until the 1905 law separating Church and State, proved to be advantageous for religious buildings belonging to the commune. Making the works of art confiscated during the Revolution available to the clergy, combined with an active policy of commissioning decors and constructing new buildings, made the churches of Paris an artistic series of buildings of exceptional wealth covering the major periods of French art, from the Classical era to the modern period.

The Department of Cultural Affairs of the City of Paris is currently responsible for conserving this considerable heritage. It is in charge of its inventory, maintenance and promotion as well as the restoration work necessary to conserve the buildings which house it.