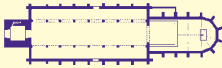


# OUDE KERK

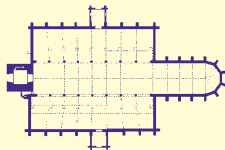
## Visitor's Information



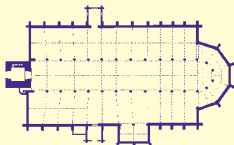
ca. 1300: A pseudo-basilical nave with narrow aisles and a small rectangular choir. The tower was built somewhat later.



1370: small choir replaced by a larger multiple-sided choir



1390: Entire nave replaced by a nave and two aisles, all three of equal width and length. This made it a hall church, possibly the first hall church in the Netherlands.

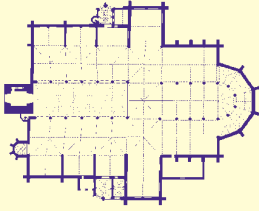


ca. 1460: The transepts were extended eastward and the choir received an ambulatory – a unique feature for a hall church. A chapel was built on the south side.

More than three centuries had passed before the Old Church, the earliest parish church in Amsterdam, attained its present form. The church has almost as many chapels as there have been building phases. The earliest building phase however is lost in the mist of time. Archaeologists think that the Amstelledammers founded their first church in the middle of the 13th century. As a site they chose a terp (artificial mound), which served as a cemetery on the east bank of the Amstel. The church was built in the form of a basilica. Although the building was 40 m. long, its size was insufficient before 30 years had passed. The fact that municipal rights had been granted to the town in 1300 by the Count of Holland resulted in a dynamic process of economic development that tempted many merchants and country people into the budding town.

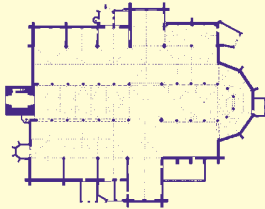
The building plan was ambitious: a hall church with a nave and two aisles, all three of which would be the same size, and an extension of the nave consisting of a long choir. The church was dedicated to St. Nicholas, the traditional patron saint of seamen (and later, curiously enough, the patron saint of bakers). This building plan was finished in several phases.

After another 50 years, the church had to be adapted once again. An obvious solution was chosen: lengthening the aisles and wrapping them around the choir in a half-circle to create the ambulatory. To give the church the form of a cross, transepts were gradually added. This building phase



Between 1485 and 1517, side chapels were built on the north and south sides of the nave and an extended transept. The portals and other additional rooms such as the Iron Chapel (that housed the city's archives) and the Holy Sepulchre on the north side.

Around 1510, the nave was heightened and clerestories were added.



Between 1550 and 1560, the Maria Chapel was added to the north side of the choir and its crossing and choir were heightened.

In 1571, seven years before the church began serving as a Protestant church, the meeting room for the Guild of Our Lady was built next to the Maria Chapel.

was slowed most likely due to the raging fires of 1421 and 1452 that reduced great parts of the town, with its wooden houses, to ashes. The church, however, was miraculously saved. Another reason for the delay was the building of the New Church on the Dam. This church turned out to be a rival in the competition for financial means. In addition, the Old Church now came into conflict with the existing development surrounding it. Large-scaled extensions to its width were no longer possible: an end to any enlargement was nigh. Fortunately the existing transepts still made it possible to build side chapels on the north and south sides early in the 16th century. Once this was accomplished, the floor plan became what we see today. During the latest building phase, the nave, intersection and choir were heightened by means of clerestories. Perhaps unconsciously, the architects had returned to the model of the original church on the banks of the Amstel: 70 by 60 by 20 metres.

### **The misuse of God's church has come to an end here as of the year 1578**

(text on the choir screen at the side of the nave)

#### **After the Reformation**

The Old Church suffered from the iconoclastic fury in 1566 that left a trail of destruction throughout the Netherlands. The church was violently looted and vandalised. The victory of the Calvinists in 1578 made this violation complete. Sculptures of saints and altars disappeared from the church and only because the wall paintings in the vaults were difficult to reach were they saved for posterity although painted over many times. Before 'the Alteration' as this reformation is called, the Old Church was used as the city's 'living room'. In the same way that

drifters now seek shelter in the Central Station, beggars and wanderers then slept in the church and peddlers displayed their goods there. Obviously, the followers of Calvin found this unacceptable as we can read on the choir screen at the side of the nave. These Augean stables were thoroughly cleansed. During the 17th century, the attention of church authorities focused on the interior: the pulpit, monuments and memorial stones. The two organs were used for concerts and for church services and were rebuilt from time to time. The large one, rebuilt in 1724/1742 by Christian Vater and Johann Caspar Müller, became quite famous. Even so, improvements during this time were limited to the interior.

The last building activities took place in the 18th century when a ring of small houses was constructed around the church. It was around this time that parts of the oak vaults were renewed which meant irreplaceable damage to the wall paintings. In 1755, the entire vault was painted Prussian blue. Under this coat of paint, however, the wood began to rot and this became clearly visible in the 20th century. Although emergency restorations were made from 1912 to 1914, they were insufficient. As a result, the Old Church had to close its doors in 1951 due to the danger of collapse.

To save this historic building, a foundation known as the Stichting de Oude Kerk te Amsterdam took over the ownership of the church from the Dutch Reformed congregation in 1955 and had a major restoration carried out that was completed in 1979. Later, during the consolidating renovation from 1994-1998, the stained glass windows were given a protective coating on the outside. Since then, the Old Church has become an official European monument and has thus joined the ranks of the most important historic buildings in Europe.

#### ORDINANCE AGAINST UNSEEMLY BEHAVIOUR

This sign was painted by C. Dirckszn as commissioned by the church council in 1593. By reading it, one can get an idea of how 'nice it must have been to be in the living room of the city' (the church) before the Calvinists took over the building.

"Furthermore, a regulation announced by the pealing of the city's bells forbids anyone, whether they be in the churches or on the churchyards, to behave in an unseemly or sullen manner. The sextons, gravediggers and dog beaters as well as the police officers are authorised to enforce this regulation. This is to warn everyone to beware of abusing the churches or the churchyards in any way whatsoever so as not to receive the punishment for committing such an offence."

(‘Dog beaters’ were people assigned to beat stray dogs to death; they were also sometimes assigned other duties.)

#### JAN PIETERSZOOON SWEELINCK

The Old Church's most famous organist was Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562 - 1621). He was appointed organist at the age of fifteen to succeed his father, Pieter Swybertszoon. Sweelinck remained the organist for the Old Church until his death. At the time of Sweelinck's appointment, the Old Church was still a Catholic church. Shortly thereafter, in 1578, the Alteration occurred and the church became a Protestant church. Sweelinck continued as organist but was then in the service of the city administration. Thenceforward, he would no longer play during the church services but before and after them. In addition, the city commissioned him to play for an hour several times a week. We know that Vondel, the poet, was one of his many listeners.

Sweelinck's fame as an organist ensured that in 1606 he started attracting students to Amsterdam from Poland, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, and particularly Germany. Through these students, Sweelinck influenced a whole generation of organists and became one of the most important founders of the German school of organ playing. Without these students, Sweelinck's keyboard pieces would surely have been lost to us. After all, it was these students took copies of the music they had studied in Amsterdam home with them. Those copies found their way into libraries and are now the only source of the works that Sweelinck wrote for the organ or the harpsichord. In addition to work for keyboard instruments, Sweelinck wrote many vocal pieces. These were published during his lifetime, usually in Antwerp. Sweelinck died in 1621 and was buried in the ambulatory of the Old Church under tombstone number 100.

#### THE ORGANS OF THE OLD CHURCH AND SWEELINCK

The Old Church has a long tradition of having excellent organs and organists. Even during the fifteenth century, an organ was hanging on the west wall (tower wall) of the nave. In 1539, the church acquired a new instrument that was played between 1577 and 1621 by a famous organist by the name of Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck.

#### THE GREAT ORGAN

In 1724, the church wardens of the Old Church commissioned Christian Vater, the Hamburg organ builder, to build an entirely new organ to replace the old one. Vater completed this organ in 1726 and the churchwardens were very pleased: the instrument was "absolutely perfect in every way". In 1738, the tower began to subside. For restoration activities, the organ had to be dismantled. Once the tower had been restored, Caspar Müller was commissioned to re-install the organ. Not only did Müller put it back, but he made major changes as well, his belief being that after its renovation, the organ 'should speak promptly and forcefully and should be heard during the singing'. The Vater-Müller organ would remain largely unchanged until 1869 when G.F.H. Witte updated it to accommodate contemporary tastes requiring a sound that was less sharp and more rounded. Although Witte changed the sound, hardly a piece of the original material was lost. Since Witte's renovation, the organ has remained unchanged. The Old Church Organ has always been admired. It was once mentioned in the famous 18th-century travelogue written by Charles Burney. Even today, it attracts organ enthusiasts – both listeners and players – from all over the world. The case for the organ was designed by Jurriaan Westerman. Above the organ are the old city seal of Amsterdam with the cargo ship and the city's coat of arms with the three Andreas crosses.

#### THE SMALL (OR TRANSEPT) ORGAN

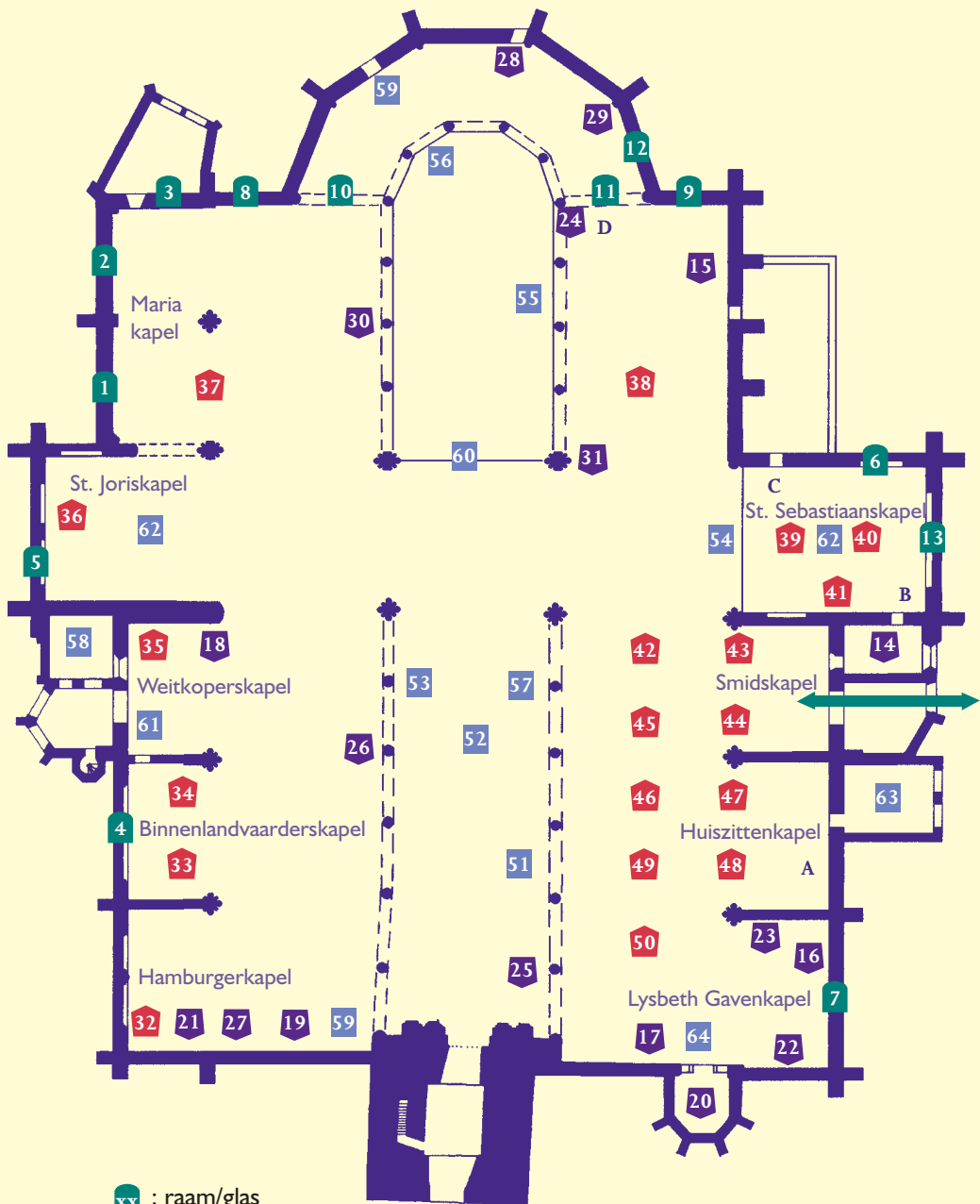
This organ was built in 1658 by the famous organ maker Hans Wolff Schonat. In building it, he used some of the pipes taken from another organ at this location that had been built by Hendrik Niehoff. The shutters for the new organ were painted by Cornelis Brizé. The instrument was used for concerts commissioned by the city's administration. During the 18th century, it was used less and less frequently so that when an organ had to be built for the Zuiderkerk in 1821, the pipes from the small organ in the Old Church were used. The case, however, remained behind. In 1964 and 1965, a new organ was built for the old organ case by organ makers Ahrend & Brunzema from the East Friesian town of Loga near Leer. Its disposition was taken from the famous collection of dispositions of Joachim Hess, an organist from Gouda, and dates from 1774. It has become a beautiful instrument with great artistic eloquence and was even enlarged after being returned in 2001 to a 17th-century middle-tone tuning.

#### THE CABINET ORGAN

The cabinet organ was built in 1767 by Amsterdam organ maker Deetlef Onderhorst, supposedly for a private client. In 1946, the organ was repaired by organ builder A. Blik who also replaced its manual wind chest with an electronic system. In 1977, the organ was completely restored by Adema's Kerkorgelbouw. The restoration included having the cabinet restored and completed and removing the white coat of paint that had been added in 1953. After its most recent restoration, the organ was installed in the choir of the Old Church.

#### THE IRON CHAPEL

This is where a chest covered in iron plates and painted with the coat of arms of Amsterdam was kept that held the city's most important documents: its trading privileges. The chest was placed in a niche that had been cut into the wall. Anyone wishing to see these documents had to assemble a large group of important persons. The iron door, located around 4 metres above the ground, had three locks: two in a lock case and one padlock. The two keys were kept by two ruling burgomasters and the town clerk. Before the door could be opened, a mason would first have to hack away the mortar around the door (that would then have to be replaced afterward). Behind the iron door was another locked oak door. In 1892, the archive chest and its contents were transferred to the municipal archive.



xx : raam/glas

xx : graf

xx : gewelf

xx : overig

A: Ordinansy teges de onsturicheijt

B: Ijzeren kapel

C: Roôdeur

D: J.P. Sweelinck