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Aerial view of Joigny, church of Saint-Jean and Gondi chateau at center.
Images collected by the Vincentian Studies Institute

The view from Saint-Jean of the town and Yonne river.
Courtesy of Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL
Pictures from the Past: 

*Joigny, France*¹

**By**

**John E. Rybolt, C.M.**

Philippe Emmanuel de Gondi (1581-1662) became count of Joigny on the death of his uncle Cardinal Pierre de Gondi (1533-1616). Vincent in his capacity as tutor and chaplain for the Gondis often stayed in this important family home. The church of *Saint John* [Saint-Jean], adjacent to the Gondi castle, was probably located on the site of a former monastery chapel dating from the tenth century. Stout walls later fortified the site, whose strategic value is clear from its location above the valley of the river Yonne. The church was dedicated on 28 May 1504 but was ruined by the great fire of 1530. It was then rebuilt, and its magnificent barrel vault ceiling dates from between 1557 and 1597. An arcade of bays supports this vault on each side and above the columns stand the apostles. During the Revolution, the church was given over to the worship of the goddess Reason. Some original stained glass windows remain, but aerial bombing destroyed the majority on 15 June 1940. The town has revived and today has about 5000 inhabitants.

¹ The following is an edited excerpt from Rev. John E. Rybolt’s *In the Footsteps of Vincent de Paul: A Guide to Vincentian France* (Chicago: DePaul University Vincentian Studies Institute, 2007), 450 pp. Part historical overview, part travel guide, the book offers an examination of sites throughout France, both major and minor, related to the Vincentian Family. The book is available for purchase online at http://vsi.depaul.edu, click on Printed Resources < Bookstore < Books < Books: Misc.; or inquire by phone at 312-362-7139.
In a chapel on the right side is a noteworthy sculpture of the entombment of Christ, the work of Mathieu Laignel, a sixteenth-century artist. This piece had been in the parish church at Folleville, where Vincent would have seen it. It was located there behind the main altar. Pierre de Gondi (1606-1676), son of Philippe Emmanuel, had it removed in 1634 and brought to Joigny when he sold his parents’ Folleville property. He placed it in the family castle where it remained to 1723, when it was moved to the church. The marble carvings recall those in Folleville. For example, the front of the sarcophagus depicts the profiles of Raoul de Lannoy and his wife. These statuary groups became popular in northern Europe after the scourge of the Black Death in the late fourteenth century, which prompted new reflections on the sufferings and death of Jesus. Besides the main group, there are also three small statues of kneeling angels, holding armorial shields of the ancestral families of Madame de Gondi. Because of their size, they are not exhibited.

Near this sculpture is another of Adelais, countess of Joigny, dating from the thirteenth century. Her tomb, too, like the entombment sculpture, was transferred here centuries later, around 1892.

The interior and front steps of the church of Saint-Jean. Courtesy of Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL
An altar honors Saint Vincent. The modern windows above it depict the chapel at the Berceau and his silver coffin at the motherhouse in Paris.

A castle has stood on this spot since 996; the monks who had previously lived here were removed at that time. Over the centuries the castle grew and the town with it. Together with the church, an earlier chateau burned down in 1530. The present chateau began in 1569 and became habitable after 1603, when Philippe Emmanuel’s brother Henri, Cardinal de Retz (1572-1622) bought it. Intricate Renaissance details give the building a sense of great dignity. The building, however, has remained unfinished. Once restored, the Gondi chateau will be open for visitors. Philippe Emmanuel de Gondi died in this castle after 35 years of priesthood but was buried in Paris at the Oratorian church of Saint Magloire, now demolished.
A staircase behind the castle leads to the street below. A house identified as that where Vincent stayed is now a private home, not open to the public. (10, rue Dominique Grenet) A plaque identifies it: “Saint Vincent de Paul lived in this house.” His visits here can be precisely dated up to 1618. He made others in 1628 and 1629 and gave a mission lasting four months in 1638-1639. His confrères also gave missions in Joigny and throughout the region, as they were required to do in virtue of the foundation that the Gondis established. This work continued at least until the early 18th century.

The Maison de Bois and Maison de Jessé: prime examples of timbered homes in Joigny. Courtesy of Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL

Outside the gate in front of the church is the bailiff’s house, the most impressive timbered house in Joigny. It was built after the fire of 1530, with many Renaissance details. Unfortunately, the bomb that destroyed the stained glass in the church also destroyed the façade of this house. It has been rebuilt, but the side on Ruelle haute Saint-Jean is original. Vincent would have passed it often and possibly entered since the bailiff in the founder’s time signed the document establishing the confraternity of Joigny.
Joigny also features the important church of Saint Thibault. Begun about 1450, it was completed in 1529, the year before the great fire. The tower was finished in the seventeenth century. The building contains important statuary and other works of art. A window recalls Vincent’s presence: “In memory of the Confraternity of the Ladies of Charity of Joigny, 1613.” This confraternity, the third that he founded, covered the whole town and included as members the pastors of Saint Thibault and the two other parishes. The window is dated 1927.
The church is also important as the baptismal church of Madeleine Sophie Barat (1779-1865). She was born in Joigny — her birthplace is preserved and may be visited — and was baptized the following day, 12 December 1779. She made her first communion in this same church in 1789. Stained glass and marble plaques record these events. Her brother Louis studied at the Saint Firmin seminary in Paris, the former Bons Enfants. Madeleine Sophie went on to found the Society of the Sacred Heart. One of the sisters of the Society, Philippine Duchesne (1769-1852), founded the first house of the community in the diocese of Saint Louis, Missouri, in the United States. Philippine Duchesne knew and esteemed Felix De Andreis, the first Vincentian superior in America. She was canonized in 1988. Mother Barat, as she was called, was canonized in 1925. (11, rue Davier)

The third parish of Joigny was Saint-André, now no longer used. (Place de la Republique) Its pastor was one of the three who, under the guidance of Vincent de Paul, founded the confraternity of women (1618) and then the mixed confraternity of men and women (1621).
An alternate view of Saint-André.

Courtesy of Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL
The headquarters of the confraternity was the chapel of the *Saint Antoine Hospital*, a foundation dating from the twelfth century. This was part of a larger building, some of whose walls are still standing. After the Revolution, hospital services were transferred to another old establishment, still in use across the Yonne (*avenue Gambetta*), and the Saint Antoine buildings became first a secondary school (1848-1968), and later a music school. The old chapel is now the city’s school of dance. (*24, rue saint Jacques*) Vincent also received two houses from members of the confraternity for various charitable uses. (*Maison de Charité, 2 bis and adjoining house, rue du Four Banal*) This charitable work lasted from 1620 to 1661.

The city also has a church of *Saint Vincent de Paul*. Begun in 1960 to serve a new housing development, it recalls Vincent’s presence among and care for the people of Joigny.

Vincent also went at least once to the Carthusian monastery, Valprofonde, located near Joigny, on the south side of the Yonne. Some seven kilometers from the river is Béon and, two kilometers farther south on D943, a small access road leads to the farm, still called Les Chartreux (the Carthusians). The present buildings, while old, probably are not the original Carthusian foundation, which would normally have a distinct architecture.
allowing for a semi-eremitic life for the monks. Vincent recalled the advice given him during his retreat, which helped him overcome temptations he suffered while hearing confessions.²

The small town of Villecien is a short distance west of Joigny. A pastor, Jean Maurice, was the first moderator of the Confraternity of Charity of Joigny. The name of the town also appears once in Vincent’s correspondence.³ He was here after giving a mission on one of the estates of Antoine Hennequin, Sieur of Vincy (d. 1645). His father had built the family castle, still standing, and it is likely that Vincent stayed in the castle. Monsieur de Vincy, as he was called, continued to befriend and support the saint. Indeed, on his deathbed he received permission to join the Congregation of the Mission, and was buried in the Saint-Lazare chapel. His sister, Isabelle Du Fay (also Du Fey or Fays, d. 1635) lived here as well. Both were close confidants of Louise and Vincent, perhaps because they were related to her through Michel de Marillac, her uncle. The parish church generally preserves the appearance it had in Vincent’s day. Its elaborate presidential chair and baptismal font were there in his time. Members of the Hennequin family were also the lords of Clichy when Vincent was pastor there.

Local tradition also associates Vincent with **Paroy-sur-Tholon**, a small town south of Joigny on D955, probably one of several depending on the Confraternity of Charity in Joigny. Nothing exists in the town or in the parish church to recall his ministry.
South of Joigny is Saint-Fargeau. Daughters of Charity came here to work in the hospital and opened a small school. They arrived in 1657 at the initiative of the duchess of Montpensier, Anne Marie Louise d’Orléans (1627-1693). She had been a rebel leader in the Fronde and is known for opening the gates of Paris to the prince of Condé’s army. This act was ultimately fruitless, as the Parisians rejected the rebels and welcomed the king, his mother and Cardinal Mazarin back in their midst. The life of the Daughters in Saint-Fargeau was attractive enough to draw several others to join their Company. Their house, already old when they arrived, is still standing and serves as a retirement home. The town today numbers fewer than 2000 persons. (Maison de retraite, rue du Moulin de l’Arche, and rue de l’Hôpital)