

WELCOME TO

the Church of Gräsgård



CHURCHES ON ÖLAND

If you live on an island, you must be able to sail. Living by the Southern Baltic Sea has brought extensive contacts with the nations to the South.

Already in the Viking Age, the change of religion became obvious on Öland, not least because Christian graves began to appear on the village burial sites. The first churches were built during the 11th century, using wood and stave technique. A few scattered stave church planks still remain. Monuments engraved with runes have withstood the ravages of time and are preserved in six churches.

During the 12th century, 34 stone churches were built here. Soon after that, seven chapels were added at fishing villages and trading places. The earliest churches had windows and porches facing both the North and the South. A few even had a tower at the West end, and if so there would also be a porch there. Around each church, a burial place was provided for the dead and a stone wall surrounded the holy place. These churchyards are still in use.

In the 13th century and the Middle Ages many churches were provided with secular top floors and to almost half of them, a tower was added at the East End as well. The church buildings served as places for worship as well as storage space and for overnight accommodation. The role of the church during the

Middle Ages shows how the church and the world went hand in hand. The following centuries saw only interior changes to most of Öland's churches. They were provided with arches and sometimes with new quires or porticos. Following the Reformation, new demands were made on church buildings. Preferably, the congregation should be seated, but the small medieval churches were short of space. Additions widened many churches, but towards the end of the 18th century, the thought of new buildings gained ground.

The churches on Öland have very few medieval artefacts. Numerous wars and the ravages by the Danes in 1677 left little behind. Today only one medieval church on Southern Öland is preserved intact. In another three, medieval rooms have survived. Seven churches have medieval towers.

Today's churches preserve ideals of style and function from the 18th and 19th century hall churches. The seated congregation listens to the service and sings together. Large windows make it easy to read from the Hymnal and the sermon spreads the Word throughout the entire building. Modern churches are gradually adapted to modern forms. Flexibility, participation and even technology make demands. On Southern Öland, one church has been adapted to modernity while preserving its medieval structure – the Church of Ventlinge.

SOMETHING ABOUT THE CHURCH OF GRÄSGÅRD

The church of Gräsgård is surrounded by the trees of the cemetery, situated in the almost tree-less South-East of Öland. The ancient Fort of Eketorp can be seen from the tower and towards the East the fishing boats still make for the Harbour of Gräsgård.

The church was built in the 12th century, consisting of a nave, a quire and an absid. A narrow Western tower was added soon afterwards. The tower was as wide as the nave and was covered by a saddle roof crosswise to the nave. During the Middle Ages, the church was lengthened towards the East and given a straight end to the quire and the quire porch. The bell was hung in a nesting box on the West side of the tower but was later moved to the roof of the tower.

In the 1820s, the medieval nave was pulled down and the tower and the current hall church was built. Extensive changes were made during a renovation in 1884 and the Neo-Gothic style of that time characterised the church. The top part of the tower was rebuilt and a small lanternin with a high spire was added. Thus the tower became as high as the Light House of Långe Jan on the South Peninsula. The interior was painted in the decorative style of the time, including the addition of text bands.

The decorations of the church interior disappeared in the early 1900-hundreds and the current interior with the building under the gallery and new colouring stems from the 1980s.



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The church of Gräsgård, one of six churches in the Parish of South Öland, with its high copper-clad spire, can be seen from afar.

History

The church has a history reaching back to the 12th century and maybe even earlier. In the 17th and 18th centuries there was still a striding stile made of a runestone with the text "The Brothers Dreng and Sighsten erected this stone after Wifast. God help his soul." Unfortunately, the runestone is no longer there, but because of it we can assume that there were Christian inhabitants at Gräsgård as early as the middle of the 11th century, when the first church was a small wooden stave-church, later in the 12th century replaced by a stone church.

This picture, which is a drawing by the Antiquarian J.H. Rhezelius, shows what the church looked like from the South in 1634. It probably looked like that already in the 13th century. Above the door can be seen a small square with a dot, where it is said that a so-called carbuncle was once placed. That was a strongly shining red-coloured precious stone, which was intended to guide seafarers. According to legend, the Danes took the stone as loot during the 1611 war. However, the ship carrying the stone was lost South of Öland and the carbuncle is said to lie at the bottom of the sea, "shining for those who travel over it."



In the church yard

A gravestone has been raised against the outside South wall. It originates from 1698 and refers to Pastor Anders Triberg (Tribergius) who probably witnessed the Dane's plunder of the church in 1677. His son, Fr Triberg the younger, who too was vicar of the parish, is also buried in the churchyard. In 1710 he experienced the ravishes of the pest at Gräsgård. Within 10 weeks he had to bury 344 people, about 75% of the population of the parish. The "cinerary tumba" from 1794 on the South side are for the provost Carl David Donner and his wife.



Welcome inside

On entering the church of Gräsgård, having passed the porch with its stairs to the gallery, you first come into the ante-chamber which was added during the 1980 restorations, following the drawings of Rolf Berg. Here smaller services may be held, and the room also functions as a place to gather for coffee after church etc.

During the 1980 restoration, the church interior was given a new range of colours by Sven-Bertil Svensson. The strong colours and the sky-blue ceiling contributes to an experience of light and space as you enter the church.

During the 1823 reconstruction, the church was given a so-called altar pulpit, but that was replaced in 1884 by a pulpit placed in the traditional manner on the North side of the quire. The organ face is also from the 1823 reconstruction, and the organ itself was built by Åkerman & Lund (restored in 1969).

Modern art

In the quire, by the North door into the sacristy lies a flat cross for candles, made by driftwood and donated by Rolf Knutsson. There are also three works by the glass/textile artist Bodil Magnusson at Seby in the church. A glass cross in the South window in the ante-chamber, a textile pillar of light above the baptismal font and a work celebrating the women of the parish can be found in the window at the end on the North side.



Let there be light

The oldest sources of light in the church are two chandeliers cast in brass and crowned by double eagles. One of them holds ten candles, the other six, and they were made in 1716 by the bellfounder Mårten Wetterholtz at Kalmar. An even larger chandelier for 21 candles was donated in 1857.



Baptismal fonts

There are two baptismal fonts in the quire of the church. The bowl of the stone font was made in 1603 and has the inscription "Marci XVI. Qvi credit et rite baptizatus fuerit salvus" ("Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved.") This font is currently in use. The other font is of a later date. It was sculptured by Anton Wahldov, Kalmar and donated by the Gräsgård Young People's Association in 1907.

On the walls

The old reredos, "Golgota" by Edvard Orm from the early 18th century hangs on the North wall. The current reredos is a copy of the "Christus Consolator" by the Danish artist Carl Boch. The copy was made by Jacob Sivén. On the South wall there is a painting by Elvira Larsson Hjort from 1954.



The votive ship of the church

The votive ship, full-rigged with all her sails set, was given by the supervisor at the Gräsgård Life Boat Rescue station as a thanksgiving sacrifice to "The Great Pilot" for having escaped all the dangers at sea. It is not known who made this model, but it was bought by a furniture trader at Degerhamn. Legend has it that the ship fell to the floor during some party, and all the rigg went into scraps, but an old sailor, Gustaf Petersson, restored the model before it was donated to the church of Gräsgård. This ship has been given the name Rut, but there has never been any Swedish full-rigged ship bearing that name. The story is told in the book "Kyrkskeppen berättar" (The Stories Told by the Church Ships) by Anders Nilsson.

Welcome back!

Our church is open and welcomes you even though there are only a few services, since worship alternates between the six churches in our parish. In the summer the church is usually open every day. There are exceptions, and the best way to find information is through "Summer-open Churches" on our website:

www.svenskakyrkan.se/sodraoland

The Joint Parish of Southern Öland consists of 7 parishes that together manage 18 churches and 1 chapel. The church of Gräsgård is situated in the Parish of South Öland.

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