

WELCOME TO THE

Gårdby Church

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.

THE GÅRDBY CHURCH

The church at Gårdby belongs to the group called cross-road churches, which are common on Öland. The church is linked to the church village and is surrounded by an iron-age burial site. A late Viking Age rune stone in the church yard tells of a trading place in Novgorod, the Holmgård of the Vikings. The original church was probably a simple wooden church, which was replaced in the very early 12th century by a tower-less stone church with a narrow quire and a semi-circular apse at the East end. The quire entrance testifies to powerful lords.

In the early 13th century a strong tower was added at the West end. The tower had several floors, and the middle one might have contained a gallery with space for the aristocracy. In connection with the building of the current church, which was dedicated in 1841, the medieval church was entirely demolished. The new church was built around the old, which made it possible to use the old until the roof was laid on the new building. Even though the Bishop of Kalmar wanted to amalgamate Gårdby and the near-by Sandby churches, new

churches were built in both these parishes.

The medieval foundations at Gårdby have been archaeologically investigated in connection with the latest renovation. Re-used medieval wood was found under the floor of the new church. Parts of the roof of the medieval church had been re-used as floor beams. This wood has been dated to the first half of the 12th century. A large number of graves were also investigated, and one of them yielded particularly interesting insights into the history of the area.

The new Gårdby church is a late classicist structure, renovated and undergoing interior changes several times. The latest included setting aside a room for parish activities below the gallery. The exterior of the church is the same as when it was built.



A Walk in the Church Yard

Gårdby, Sandby and Norra Möckleby constitute a joint parish since 2002. The church is surrounded by a church yard with well kept lawns. It sounds somewhat strange to be told that the caretakers had the right to appropriate the hay from the church yards (up until the early 1940s) and that burials after Midsummer were not popular, since the hay would then be trampled down.

Manual Bell-Ringing

Up until the year 2000, the bells were rung by hand on Saturday evening at 6pm during the lighter season. In winter, the bells were rung at sunset. Thus Saturdays became a somewhat shorter working day for the people of the area during the darker season.

The Rune Stone

The rune stone to the South-East of the church dates from the late 11th century, the Vikling period. The text is interpreted thus: "Hertrud erected this stone over his son Smed. His half-brother sits at Gårdarike. Brandr carved properly, therefore it can be interpreted." The stone might indicate an early Christian community already in the Viking Age.



WELCOME INSIDE!

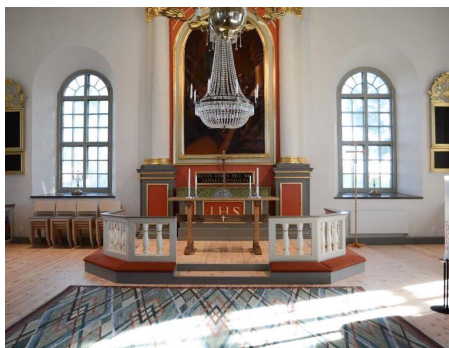
Welcome inside this church, re-dedicated in 2017. You will find an entirely new interior that has been carefully produced from scratch. The floor is completely new. Before the foundation for the wooden floor was cast, the old church was excavated. Its shape is now marked by small wooden plugs of oak tree in the new floor. The easiest place to see them is in front of the pews, in the quire.

Entering through the South porch you come into the transept. To the west you see the beautiful glass doors, separating the smaller ante-rooms under the gallery. You will spot the exquisite engravings immediately, and you can see the same pattern on the ceiling around the chandeliers, where this rosette pattern was painted in blue in a much earlier period. Should the glass doors be shut, you can see the most important of the Christian symbols.

The interior renovation in 1989 restored the warm red hues. These have now been strengthened by the clothing of the altar rails and they appear again in the red pattern on the quire carpet. The grey upholstery of the pews blend well with other painted items.



The marks



The organ, which is one of the oldest on Öland, was built in 1842 by the organ builder Sven Peter Petersson, Visby. It has 11 stops and one console. The fascia pipes give no sound. The organ has been renovated and partly rebuilt in 1888 and 1949. On both occasions some stopped were replaced. It is tuned half a tone higher than normal. The console, which is part of the fascia, has black lower keys covered by

ebony. The upper keys are covered by ivory. At the latest renovation an electric blower was added.



The top part of the old reredos, showing the Lamb of God, the Agnus Dei resting on the Book of the Seven Seals, hangs over the sacristy door. In order to understand the image, please read the Book of the Revelation to St John, chapters 4-8.



The Candle Bearer is a gift from parishioners, probably made by Lars Jaensson at Torslunda. The phantastic pew fronts were moved from the gallery, where they previously decorated the front screen.

The chandeliers in the central aisle are made, as usual, by glass or brass. The old wooden chandeliers now hang above the pews in order to give light to visitors.



In 2017, **the baptismal font** was returned to its place in the quire from the North end of the transept where it has stood since a renovation in 1957. It has survived on only minor repairs, and for a time it has served as the base for the sundial in the church yard, just like the font at Sandby.



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The current reredos shows the very first Holy Communion. As in our sister-church at Sandby, the original reredos has been placed on the South wall, where it has become a frame for the quire organ. Notice the angel, hanging free from the top frame.



The free-standing altar, designed by ATRIO Architects, was given its particular shape by the re-use of old roof beams from the 12th century church. It was dedicated by Bishop Fredrik in connection with the re-inauguration of the church on 21st May 2017.



A warm welcome back to our church. We celebrate services of worship regularly and we enjoy an active parish life.

THE EXCAVATION OF THE OLD CHURCH

During the excavation, 22 graves and bones from another six people were found. In the Middle Ages, and up until about 1800, it was common to bury people under the floor of the church. One of the graves was particularly exciting. A man in a stone coffin was buried at the mid-axis of the church.

The remains are very well preserved, including his skin. A rope of hemp had been wound around the body, from the feet all the way up across the face. Several investigations were undertaken.

The man, who had measured 172 cm, was about 35-40 years old when he died. The skeleton was dated to the period 1020-1160, but since he was buried inside the church, his burial could be narrowed down to 1120-1160, when the church was built.

It has been assumed that this could be the man who founded the Gårdby kyrka. The dates, the shape and prominent position of the grave indicate that. Damages from cuts on the skeleton shows that he was killed in battle. Besides the cut-off lower arm bones and cuts to shoulder blades and the collarbone, he had a wooden point of ivory (see picture) pushed

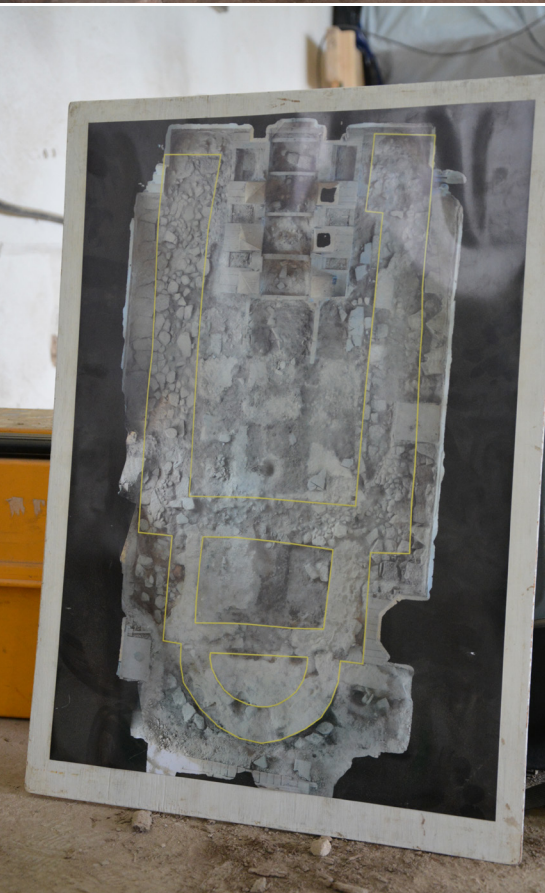
or shot from behind into the heart area. This was a violent death.

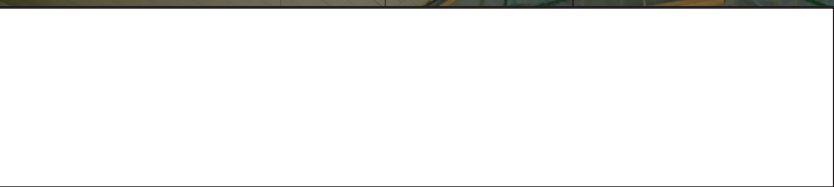
From the analysis of his stomach we know that he had eaten raspberries shortly before he died. Therefore we know that it probably happened during the summer. Since this man was a unique find, his remains have been sent to various parts of the world for further investigation and tests. The parish is currently fighting to have this man returned so that he can be buried again in the church yard outside the Gårdby church.



Pictures from the excavation

You can find more information and pictures regarding the excavation on our website;
www.svenskakyrkan.se/sodraoland/arkeolog





Denna kyrka är en av 19 kyrkor i Södra Ölands pastorat och ligger i Norra Möckleby- , Sandby, Gårdbyförsamling.

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